University of Alberta

Exemplary Teaching of Language Arts: Teacher Knowledge and Practice

by

Elizabeth Tams

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Department of Elementary Education

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Exemplary Teaching of Language Arts: Teacher Knowledge and Practice** submitted by Elizabeth Tams in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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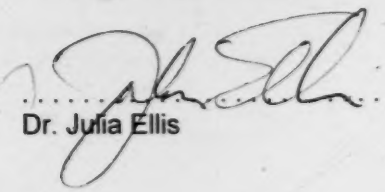

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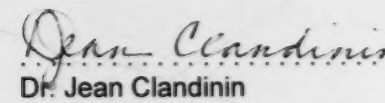

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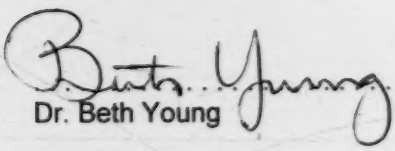

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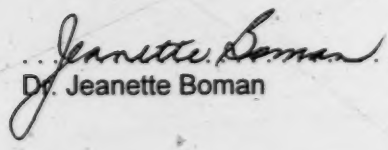

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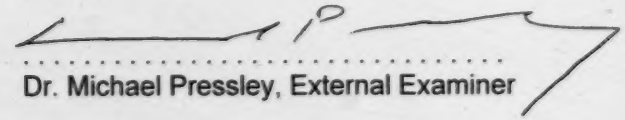

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Abstract

This qualitative case study research seeks to understand exemplary teaching as an expression of teacher knowledge. The descriptive and interpretive account of the teaching practice of three elementary school language arts teachers affords an understanding of what distinguishes their teaching as exemplary. The notion of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) provides a perspective to frame the shifting, triadic interplay of teacher, student, and content area and to understand teacher knowledge as expressed through exemplary teaching in language arts. In Chapter One I present the conceptual framework which holds to a view of teaching as a complex and multitextured endeavour that embodies more than skill and method. The review of literature in Chapter Two presents an overview of effective teaching research, then layers these findings with literature in areas such as constructivist teaching, the moral dimension of teaching, teacher knowledge, exemplary language arts teaching, and metaphorical conceptions of exemplary teaching. Chapter Three outlines the research design, in which data were collected through taped interviews, conversations with each teacher, and observations in each teacher's classroom over a three-month period. Data analysis was descriptive and interpretive, with ongoing analysis throughout the data-collection period through a system of thematic coding from which common themes across the data were discerned. Chapter Four presents descriptions of each of the participants' exemplary teaching of language arts, and in Chapter Five, an interpretive account of Jean's,

Anna's, and Belle's practice explains how their pedagogical content knowledge is expressed in their exemplary teaching of language arts. Key findings are discussed, with the following thematic areas: (a) developing as a teacher, (b) knowing the learner, (c) creating a learning culture, (d) teaching for student learning, and (e) expressions of teaching and learning. The themes are evocative of the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and the salient features of their exemplary teaching in language arts. The findings have value when viewed holistically and cohesively, reflecting the complexity of exemplary teaching. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings and a reflection on the research.

Acknowledgement

It is with appreciation and respect that I acknowledge a number of people who have played a significant role in the accomplishment of this work. First, I extend a special thank you to the three teachers who participated in the study. They welcomed me into their classrooms and without their ongoing interest and cooperation, the study would not have been possible. It is with the greatest respect that I acknowledge their participation.

To Dr. Linda Phillips, my supervisor, I extend my most sincere appreciation. As an exemplary teacher, she provided support and encouragement, and her insightful questioning motivated and extended my learning. For her guidance and mentorship, and her effort on my behalf, I am truly grateful.

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It was an honor to have Dr. Michael Pressley, distinguished scholar and Professor in Catholic Education, University of Notre Dame, as the external examiner. I thank him for his thoughtful review of my work and for the opportunity to engage in provocative dialogue around the issue of exemplary teaching of literacy.

I also wish to acknowledge the Department of Elementary Education, University of Alberta, for providing a cohort program for educators such as myself, like-minded in their pursuit of meaningful ways to link research and practice. As well, a debt of gratitude is extended to Edmonton Public Schools for affording me the opportunity to complete this work during a professional development leave.

Finally, I am grateful that my understanding of exemplary teaching has been fostered by the example of my parents, and I acknowledge, with love and appreciation, the encouragement and support of my husband, family, and friends.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Seventeen years ago, the school district in which I work became involved in a process to develop effective teachers and, subsequently, to improve student achievement. I was regarded as a successful Grade 1 teacher at the time, and in the interest of improving and learning more about my craft, I volunteered for the program. Thus began the process of a series of classroom observations, focused articulation, demonstration of specific instructional and behaviour management skills, and scripted debriefing and postobservation conferences with colleagues. There was merit to the process. For the first time since my student teaching days, there was another teacher in my classroom with whom I could discuss my practice. My skills as a teacher were labeled and defined, and as part of the supportive conferencing, I was encouraged to continue using the effective strategies. Effective teaching practices seemed straightforward, precise, and foolproof; but even then, I sensed that the depth of what I knew and did as a teacher and how I helped my students to learn to read and write were not captured by this kind of technical process.

The same observation was reinforced when I worked as a school administrator when I was responsible for the teaching and learning that occurred within my school. One of my roles was to provide formative and summative evaluations of teachers. At my disposal were the "tools of the trade": processes for the clinical supervision of staff, and handbooks and checklists that outlined

the knowledge, skills, and attitudes demonstrated in excellent teaching. Yet, as I observed teachers in classrooms and both saw and felt the way in which some teachers seemed to elevate their practice, I again sensed that the presence of particular, specified attributes did not fully capture the notion of exemplary teaching. Teaching practices can be observed, categorized, and quantified; but the sum of these parts does not fully describe the whole. Do you recall a special teacher who made a difference to your learning? And can you explain what it was that set that teaching apart? I have come to believe that the more we know about teaching and learning, the more aware we are of the ambiguity and complexity of our work, and the more difficult it is to clearly say what it is that distinguishes teaching as exemplary.

It seems that ours is an uncertain craft, like building flexible webs among constantly moving parts (McDonald, 1992). If it were like a bridge, stable and fixed, one could move decisively and rationally forward, knowing that the prescribed route would lead to the desired outcomes. Instead, we seem to be part of an amorphous triangle, with the teacher, the student, and the subject matter as the interrelated and constantly shifting points (McDonald, 1992). If the teacher and the student are part of an uncertain and shifting web, how can we describe the links that engage and influence the practice of teaching? I question the notion of certainty and suggest that we think of exemplary teaching as a multifaceted and complex endeavour that rests on more than observable attributes and skills.

Purposes of the Research

My research study has at its heart a belief that there are teachers with a grace of practice that distinguishes their teaching from others'. The interplay of their teaching and the learning of their students appears to be seamless, and the subtleties and nuances of their teaching, although discernible, are not typically observed. The research also has taken the view that such teachers hold a privileged knowledge of teaching and learning that is enacted in their practice and that through analysis and interpretation it is possible to discover, identify, and develop a better understanding of how their exemplary teaching works.

The purpose of my research is to understand the nature of exemplary teaching. To this end, the study is situated within the area of language arts, as I endeavoured to describe and interpret the teaching practices of elementary language arts teachers to afford more understanding of what distinguishes their teaching as exemplary. The research has been conducted so that the subtleties and nuances of their teaching might become more visible and, as a consequence, an understanding of the nature of exemplary teaching might emerge.

An overarching question has guided the research: How does exemplary teaching work?

As a starting point to the research, two questions guided the process:

1. What knowledge do teachers hold about exemplary teaching and learning in language arts?

2. How does teachers' knowledge inform exemplary teaching of language arts?

The study's structure and the research questions were purposefully open ended, which encouraged me to search for subtleties and nuances beyond fixed categories of thought.

Significance of the Study

At the heart of school reform and our quest for successful student learning is a tacit understanding that improved teaching, indeed, exemplary teaching, is critical to our efforts. Yet, case study descriptions of excellent teaching in elementary school language arts have been surprisingly rare. Portrayals of expert high school English teachers have been completed (Grant, 1991; Gudmundsdottir, 1991; Schulz, 1997), as has a case description of teaching based upon a whole-language approach (Edelsky, Draper, & Smith, 1983). Studies of exemplary language arts teaching have focused on large samples of teachers from which generalizations about exemplary language arts teaching have been drawn (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999; Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Allington, Block, & Morrow, 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray, Medwell, Fox, & Poulson, 2000). As well, recent case models of exemplary first grade literacy teaching have been portrayed (Morrow & Asbury, 1999; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow; 2001). Yet, very few studies have provided in-depth descriptions of the way in which teacher knowledge is enacted in exemplary classroom practice. This research study helps fill this gap. The research explores the many layers of

exemplary teaching, illustrating, and interpreting the complex, multifaceted, and contextual nature of teaching. It provides a holistic description and interpretive account of exemplary teaching as an expression of teacher knowledge.

Rossman and Rallis (1998) indicated that research can be used to enlighten: "Research findings as accumulated knowledge also serve to enhance practice through enhancing understanding of that practice. Accumulated knowledge can build practitioners' understandings of the principles behind their procedures" (p. 14). The findings of the study provide an in-depth, case study description of exemplary teaching and an interpretation of the nature of the teachers' knowledge that is expressed through exemplary practice. Thus, the research findings may enhance practitioners' understanding of how teaching works and prompt teacher reflection, inquiry, and professional growth.

The findings may be significant for university teacher preparation programs, schools, school districts, and learning ministries. The study provides current research on exemplary practice for stakeholders, who may use the descriptions as exemplars of successful language arts teaching. The descriptions also provide insight into ways in which the language arts curriculum in Alberta is being taught and the way in which exemplary teaching in language arts might encompass a balanced approach to literacy instruction.

In the study the nature of exemplary teaching is illuminated for educational stakeholders, and a contribution is made to the bodies of knowledge on exemplary teaching and teacher knowledge. The research is also significant on a personal level, because it informs my work as an educator working with

principals, teachers, consultants, and district staff. In all instances it is hoped that the research will resonate with educators who are examining their own practice, that it will support and affirm the work of teachers, and that it will foster professional pride.

Conceptual Framework

Views of Teaching and Learning

The perspective or view of teaching and learning that one holds shapes the way in which exemplary teaching is conceptualized. The conceptual framework for the study is based upon the assumption that teaching is uncertain, unpredictable, and complex; teaching is viewed as a multifaceted endeavour which embodies more than the technical skills of instruction. Multiple dimensions of teaching may encompass the teacher's subject knowledge, professional and pedagogical knowledge, personal and tacit knowledge, a repertoire of pedagogical behaviours, the relationship with the learner, personal characteristics and style, and perhaps such intangible qualities as heart, soul, and passion. Although there are commonly accepted principles of practice that define the profession of teaching, teaching often remains contextual in nature and individual in approach. As McDonald (1992) said:

> If we could root out the idea that teaching is only about skill and method, if we could foster a public perception of its moral complexity, if we could honor the role played in teaching by the teacher's productively ambivalent self, then I think we would have a chance to build the kind of schools our children and grandchildren will need in the twenty-first century. (p. 6)

When we understand that things are complex and uncertain, we gain "not only a better understanding of life but also more grace and inventiveness in living"

(p. 7). In describing and interpreting the complex, multitextured nature of exemplary teaching, it is believed that the grace and inventiveness of exemplary teaching can be better understood.

The conceptual framework for the study has evolved from my extensive experience as a classroom teacher and school principal (where I have been a privileged participant in exemplary teaching and learning in a wide range of situations), and it has been strengthened by theoretical and research-based understandings of exemplary practice. The conceptual framework adopts a view of exemplary teaching as a learner-centred, constructivist endeavour. Further, the framework rests upon a foundation of teacher knowledge wherein the teacher transforms through instruction what is known and understood by the teacher into new understandings for teacher and students.

Teacher Knowledge

Epistemology, the theory of knowledge, is concerned with what we know and how we know it. It is the branch of philosophy that considers "the nature and scope of knowledge, its presuppositions and basis, and the general reliability of the claims to knowledge" (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 19). Kessels and Korthagen (1996) traced our understanding of knowledge to Plato and Aristotle; knowledge is distinguished as episteme and phronesis. Knowledge as episteme suggests a scientific understanding that is propositional in nature. Propositional knowledge consists of assertions that can be systematically analyzed to arrive at a point at which here the knowledge can be justified as true belief. Thus, epistemic knowledge can form part of a theory that is objective, fixed, and of a general

nature and that can be applied to many different problems and situations. Formal knowledge in education has typically been derived from effective teaching research, where the scientific basis for effective teaching has been established by looking at relationships between variables. Studies of teaching, using conventional scientific methods of the social and behavioural sciences, have generated substantive formal knowledge of teaching principles and methods.

In contrast, knowledge as phronesis is seen as practical knowledge or practical wisdom that accounts for the variability of "specific concrete cases and complex or ambiguous situations" (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996, p. 19). Whereas practical knowledge requires an understanding of general principles and theories, it is the particular details of each case or situation which are perceived and acted upon. Practical knowledge entails responsiveness and flexibility and relies upon accumulated experiences; through the ongoing process of perceiving, assessing and acting, particulars become more and more familiar, and perceptions lead to insight. Thus, the teacher's practical knowledge is perceptual (with conceptual knowledge used as a guide) and remains open and flexible to allow action in imprecise situations.

Practical knowledge may be justified as formal knowledge on the basis of the teacher's reasons for doing or believing something (Fenstermacher, 1994). For example, if the teacher is fully aware of the teaching practice and can explain what was done and why it was done, then those reasons may present a coherent, ordered, and justifiable claim as knowledge. The reasons may also illustrate that it was the obvious or best course of action to take under the

circumstances, or that it was the morally right or fair action to take at the time. Practical reasoning provides a means of "transforming the tacit quality of the teacher's knowing to a level of awareness that opens the possibility for reflective consideration" (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 45). Fenstermacher indicated that the "good reasons approach" provides another way of justifying practical knowledge and teacher understandings. Donmoyer (1996) concurred, seeing practical reasoning as a way to ground professional knowledge and expertise.

The study's conceptual framework encompasses the formal and practical knowledge of teachers and rests upon a belief that teachers hold complex knowledge integral to the teaching profession that is worthy of further description. The framework of teacher knowledge is more fully explored in the review of the literature in Chapter Two and is an integral part of the research design outlined in Chapter Three.

Exemplary Teaching Within the Learning Paradigm

It might be said that two different paradigms dominate in classrooms (Barr & Tagg, 1995). The instructional paradigm centres on the teacher's actions or behaviours, and the learning paradigm focuses on whether and how students learn. Within the instructional paradigm, the teacher's role is to offer courses and programs, deliver instruction, transfer knowledge, improve instruction, and provide access to information for diverse students. In the learning paradigm the teacher's purpose is to create learning environments, facilitate student discovery or construction of knowledge, improve the quality of learning for students, and achieve success for a diverse range of students.

Exemplary teaching in the study is conceptualized as teaching that is learning and learner centred. Learning-centred teaching tends to be holistic, with the whole issue or concept considered prior to each part. Teachers use whatever learning experience works, and there are specified learning results, with public assessment. Teachers who operate in the learning paradigm play a role as facilitator of learning, creating an atmosphere for student growth. Learner-centred teachers are constantly trying to understand their students and to connect with them. They try to get into the mind of their students; they reflect on how their students learn, construct knowledge, and make sense of their world, and how, as teachers, they can participate in the learning process with their students.

The view taken in the study is that exemplary teaching exists in relationship to meaningful student learning and that meaningful learning is constructed, not transmitted. A constructivist teaching approach takes a learner-centred view that emphasizes the role of the learner in constructing knowledge. Knowledge is seen as socially constructed, not as something that resides in the teacher-as-expert that needs to be transmitted to the student. Authentic learning tasks lead to meaningful learning, and learning is enhanced through social interaction. Learning depends upon prior understandings, and students construct meaning by building upon their current knowledge. In the constructivist classroom the teacher plays a critical role, not as dispenser of knowledge, but as one who facilitates and scaffolds learning.

Cognitive and situative perspectives inform the study's conceptual framework, where the teacher plays a critical role in creating and facilitating

learning situations for students. The cognitive perspective of the study sees the teacher as a partner in the process of meaning-making, with the student as the active meaning-maker (Kauchak & Eggen, 1998). The situative perspective of the study emphasizes participation in social practice, where both the physical and social contexts of an activity, and the activity itself, are integral parts of the learning that takes place (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Student learning encompasses not only what is learned, but also the process through which it is learned and the situation within which it is learned. Learning situations are meaningful if they are authentic and students are involved in activities that extend learning beyond the classroom and lead to the development of thinking and problem-solving skills. Learning is also influenced by the social interactions of the people in the learning environment, as students make sense of ideas and theories by working and talking with others. Although individual skill and competency are important, there is also a need for shared undertakings in which individuals can contribute knowledge and skills to advance the work and the learning of the group.

The conceptual framework, with constructivist, learner-centred teaching approaches, was not viewed in a normative sense but, rather, as a starting point for conceptualizing the nature of exemplary teaching and the knowledge expressed in pedagogical practice. During the research, the conceptual framework continued to evolve to reflect the interpretive nature of the inquiry and the complex, many-layered texture of exemplary teaching.

Discussion of Terms

Effective Teaching

Effective teaching is frequently used as a generic phrase to describe good teaching or teaching that brings about the desired result. For example, teachers might be termed effective teachers if they are successful in bringing about the type of student learning (the knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes) that the teacher intends (Harris, 1999). Or similarly, teachers might be considered effective if their students are successful in meeting the goals of education as outlined in the mandated curriculum. Harris noted that the term effective teaching can be used in a broad sense to include not only observable teaching behaviours, but also the underlying principles, the pedagogical influences and processes, and the managerial and organizational aspects of effective teaching.

The term effective teaching also has more specific connotations. In the post-WWII period to the midpoint of the 1980s, extensive process-product research looked at the effects of certain teacher behaviours in relationship to student learning. Effective teachers were those who exhibited teaching behaviours that could be correlated with positive gains in student achievement. Amidst nationwide concerns that schools needed to improve, and with an array of research-identified effective teaching behaviours, teacher effectiveness programs were launched across North America. Thus, the term effective teaching became associated with the effective teaching movement of the mid 1980s and with structured effective teaching programs that were designed to improve teaching skills. Although since that time *effective teaching* has been used as a more

general description of successful teaching, the connotation of effective teaching as a technical, teacher-focused undertaking remains.

For the purpose of the study, the term effective teaching is used where it is appropriate historically, such as when it refers to teacher competencies or the technical skills of teaching as identified through process-product research, or to the period of time associated with the effective teacher movement.

Exemplary Teaching

The use of the term *exemplary* warrants discussion. First, there is the choice of the term itself, because any number of terms such as wonderful, exceptional, magical, excellent, outstanding, or superior might be used interchangeably to describe good teaching. For the purposes of the study, however, the term exemplary teaching was specifically selected to describe teaching that can act as an exemplar for others and as an inclusive term that can easily embody such superlative terms as exceptional, wonderful, or excellent. Similarly, teachers engaged in exemplary teaching can be viewed as those "whose professional accomplishments and results serve as a model for peers" (Collinson & Killeavy, 1999, p. 353). The notion of using exemplars to illustrate teaching practice can be traced to Berliner's (1986) search for the "expert pedagogue," which was launched to identify and study teachers from whom we might learn. Similarly, Shulman's (1987) description of an exemplary teacher who embodies excellence in teaching and thinking, stands as "a portrait of expertise" (p. 1) to inform the work of preservice teachers and other educational stakeholders. The research interest in exemplary teaching has grown during the

1990s (Collinson & Killeavy, 1999; Henderson, 1992; Morrow, Mandel, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Tobin & Fraser, 1991), and the use of the term to describe outstanding teaching is becoming more common. Unlike *effective teaching* (which may connote specific and narrow conceptions of teaching), *exemplary teaching* has emerged as a contemporary descriptor that seems to encompass teaching's multiple facets.

Second, there is the issue of attaching a label to a phenomenon or to a specific teacher. It is acknowledged that part of the complexity and uncertainty of teaching is due to its temporal and contextual nature. From day to day and year to year, from classroom to classroom and school to school, teachers are presented with unique challenges. What works in one situation may not work in another, and exemplary teaching may be seen as a tenuous phenomenon that is temporally or contextually bound. Yet, as we reflect upon our own experiences as students, we can likely recall at least one teacher who stands out as exemplary. Our memory does not distinguish beyond the particular time and place in which we experienced the phenomenon or qualify our impression in terms of what the teacher did in the previous or following years. Exemplary teaching is captured in the time and place of our memory, and it presents itself as vivid and real. In using the term exemplary, no claim is made as to what may happen in the future or what might have happened under different circumstances; exemplary teaching is valued as a credible phenomenon to be described and interpreted during the course of the study.

In the study exemplary teaching is used as inclusive term to describe excellence in teaching, where such teaching might inspire, inform, and stand as an exemplar of teaching to which the profession can aspire.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

What is good teaching? Educational research of the past 50 years has yielded a wealth of information that has informed our understanding of exemplary teaching. Just as the question is broad in scope, so too are the research findings vast and complex, representing thousands of studies. Successive studies have built upon previous findings so that over time our understanding of exemplary teaching has grown, and our understanding of the complexity of teaching has deepened. Although the research may have been conducted from different conceptual frameworks and varied methodological perspectives, and with different views of teaching, the quantity and breadth of findings have allowed us to reach some degree of consensus on the generic qualities of successful teaching practices.

A generic description or common understanding of good teaching forms the basis of teacher preparation programs, provincial certification requirements, performance evaluation standards, and stakeholder expectations. In some part the description has evolved from the classroom and school, where we see in practice distinguishing characteristics of teachers that promote successful learning in students; and we know, almost by intuition or common sense, who the "good teachers" are. Good teachers have been portrayed in various ways in the research centred in North America. Research findings in areas such as effective teaching, reflective practice, teacher knowledge, constructivist teaching, and the

moral dimensions of teaching have value when viewed together, thus informing our understanding of teaching as complex and multifaceted.

In this chapter I review the literature that has informed my understanding of exemplary teaching in language arts. First, the general notion of exemplary teaching is considered by tracing its roots to the effective teaching research. The review of this literature indicates that there is some consensus on the principles of practice that seem to contribute to successful teaching and learning. Research in the area of reflective practice is then discussed, where the (a) moral dimension of teaching, (b) constructivist approaches to teaching, and (c) elements of teaching style, artistry, and problem solving add layers of texture to what we know about exemplary teaching practice. A critical feature of exemplary teaching is that it exists in relationship to, and is interactive with, student learning. This is explored in the literature, and embedded in the review is the notion of teacher-student 'bi-directionality,' where exemplary teaching forms part of a critical and interdependent relationship with student learning (Cooper & McIntyre, 1996). From the broad, holistic view of exemplary practice, I then look more specifically at research on exemplary teaching of elementary school language arts, where strands from each of the previously reviewed areas of research weave their way into the key findings of this research. Finally, I review literature that has helped to enhance and refine the conceptual framework for my research, where exemplary teaching is an expression of teacher knowledge and where such knowledge might be viewed or expressed metaphorically.

Overview of Effective Teaching Research

Effective teaching research is a key part of the foundation upon which the teaching profession has been built. Research on effective teaching has spanned many decades, with a large amount of research conducted during the 1970s and 1980s. Typically, studies were designed to look at some facet of effective teaching in relationship to student learning gains as measured by academic achievement data. Such research has often been referred to as *process-product* research, where the process (of how the teacher behaves in the classroom) is linked to the product of the teaching (or student outcomes). The research tended to be linear and category based so that specific characteristics and behaviours of effective teachers were considered, with an attempt made to discern whether a particular behaviour or teaching element had an effect on student learning. When linked to student achievement gains, the research has formed part of the body of knowledge of how effective teachers conduct their teaching.

Brophy and Good (1986) have worked extensively in the area of effective teaching but cautioned that, despite an orderly base of research that links teacher behaviour to achievement, the linkages are not always clear or easily translated into prescriptions for teaching practice. To research specific behaviours requires that all other behaviours be stripped away. To be meaningful, however, the findings must be interpreted by reconsidering "the teacher behaviours as parts of larger patterns occurring in particular contexts" (p. 366). Research findings on specific effective teaching strategies must be considered as part of a teacher's larger repertoire of skills and knowledge, all of

which are contextually bound. As well, it should be kept in mind that a great deal of the effective teaching research has been conducted in classrooms where a teacher-directed or "frontal" teaching approach is used. Thus the descriptions of effective teaching behaviours must be interpreted as occurring within that kind of context.

Teacher Attributes

The very early research on effective teaching attempted to describe desirable teacher attributes. In an initial comprehensive review, Barr (1958) looked at hundreds of studies of teacher characteristics, spanning a 50-year period. The commonalities were such that Barr was able to compile the findings into a manageable list of 12 characteristics important for successful teaching. Desirable teacher attributes, as gleaned from the studies, fell within each of the following areas: (a) resourcefulness and creative initiative; (b) intelligence; (c) emotional stability and maturity; (d) consideration for others; (e) buoyancy, or optimism, enthusiasm, and humour; (f) objectivity and fairness; (g) drive, energy, and purposefulness; (h) dominance, self-confidence, and courage; (i) attractiveness; (j) refinement; (k) cooperativeness; and (l) reliability.

Similarly, Ryans (1960) conducted research (involving over 6,000 elementary and secondary teachers from 1,700 schools) to identify the most desirable teacher characteristics. Twenty-five effective teaching behaviours were identified, which Ryans then clustered within three primary patterns of successful teaching. First, it was found that successful teachers are understanding, friendly, and responsive. They are interested in students' personal and educational

needs, they praise and encourage, and they are fair and impartial. Of the three patterns, elementary teachers (whether male or female) tended to score higher on the first pattern of friendly and understanding classroom behaviours. The second pattern indicates that successful teaching is responsible, business-like, and systematic, not unplanned or slipshod. Successful teachers are clear in giving directions, and there is a well-organized, overall plan for classroom procedures. In the third pattern successful teachers are stimulating, imaginative, and original rather than dull and routine. They appear enthusiastic and cheerful, and they try to provide interesting, original materials and techniques to stimulate students.

The attributes found in the Barr (1958) and Ryans (1960) studies delineate teacher characteristics that educational stakeholders would likely agree are desirable; however, the studies did not provide insight into how or why the characteristics engender successful teaching. Teachers who are enthusiastic, friendly, resourceful, creative, and purposeful may or may not be exemplary in practice; and personality traits alone are not at the heart of good teaching. A consideration of attributes is important to our understanding of effectiveness when layered with other elements such as teacher characteristics and behaviours, effective instructional practices, and positive classroom organization, all of which have been looked at in the effective teaching research.

Reviews of Effective Teaching Studies

The research on effective teaching is extensive; teacher characteristics and behaviours have been scrutinized, and specific teaching methods have been singled out for close analysis to determine effect. The sheer magnitude of research is such that without some way to highlight the studies, important findings might be overlooked or have little influence on practice. To this end, a number of researchers have attempted to review and synthesize the findings. The various reviews allow us to generalize across studies, to consider principles common to and evident in a range of situations over a period of time, and to describe more fully some of the critical effective teaching behaviours.

In one of the early studies, Rosenshine and Furst (1971) conducted a review of 42 correlational process-product studies, finding five teacher processes which consistently resulted in positive student outcomes. These included (a) the teacher's clarity of presentation and ability to organize classroom activities; (b) the teacher's use of varied materials, media, and activities; (c) the teacher's visible enthusiasm; (d) the teacher's task orientation, seen through an academic focus with structured routines; and (e) the students' opportunity to learn through engaged time and content coverage.

Similarly, Gage's (1978) analysis of 49 process-product studies identified three clusters of teacher behaviours that have a positive effect on student outcomes and have stood the test of time. First, teachers create a healthy emotional classroom climate in which they accept student feelings and ideas. Second, they attend to students' needs; offer praise, support, and

encouragement; and reduce tension through the use of humour. Third, they accept, clarify, and build on student ideas. Together, the clusters support the notion of a democratic, warm teacher. Gage also drew upon studies in elementary reading and math to summarize a number of effective teaching principles that are observable in classrooms. Teachers establish general class procedures to ensure that students know what to do, thus limiting time spent on organizing the class and giving directions. A system of procedural rules, known and followed by students, is in place. Teachers move around the classroom, monitor student work, and communicate their awareness of student behaviour and academic needs. They provide interesting and worthwhile assignments that can be completed independently by students, and they utilize fast-paced activities. Questioning skills are apparent, as are strategies that enable the less academic student to become involved.

Walberg (1991) provides a summary of approximately 8,000 studies of elementary and secondary students, and research on teaching and instruction. The summary compiles the effects of various elements of teaching, allowing for a comparison of those that are effective with those that are not. Walberg found the effective teaching elements to be the use of cues, student engagement, corrective feedback, and reinforcement. Teachers' use of cues lies in clearly showing students what is to be learned and explaining how to learn it. Effective teachers foster engagement of students, and students are actively and purposefully involved in learning activities, devoid of irrelevant behaviour.

Corrective oral feedback is provided by effective teachers, as is reinforcement that supplies both information and positive encouragement to the student.

Demon-Berger (1986) has also compiled observations from research on what constitutes effective teaching, noting that the characteristics tend to fall into the areas of classroom management and instructional techniques. It was found that effective teachers are task oriented, believe in their own efficacy, and hold high expectations for students. Discipline is handled through prevention, and effective teachers are democratic in their approach. They have a strong grasp of the subject matter and are concerned with perceptual meanings rather than facts and events. They tend to use systematic instructional techniques, and they vary their teaching strategies. Effective teachers also tend to exhibit such personal characteristics as warmth, caring, and enthusiasm and are accessible to students outside of class.

The well-known work of Brophy and Good (1986) provides a comprehensive review of process-product studies conducted from 1973 to 1983 which links teacher behaviour and student achievement. Again, the teacher-effects studies link student learning to teacher expectations, classroom management, active teaching, questioning skills of the teacher, and student-engaged time. In effective teaching, teachers structure how they provide information and do so with clarity and enthusiasm and with appropriate pacing and sequencing. They monitor students, provide realistic praise and feedback, show flexibility, and are task oriented. The work of Brophy and Good highlighted the notion that teachers with effective teaching practices are distinguished by

"the expectations and achievement objectives they hold for themselves, their classes, and individual students; how they select and design academic tasks; and how actively they instruct and communicate with students about academic tasks" (p. 370). Further, successful teachers do these things with a "blend of knowledge, energy, motivation and communication and decision-making skills that many teachers, let alone ordinary adults, do not possess" (p. 370). If there is a myth that anyone can teach, it might be dispelled by the depth and breadth of findings that show otherwise.

Summary of Effective Teaching Reviews

From the effective teaching research, there appears to be a consensus that there are fundamental characteristics and behaviours that may be exhibited by effective teachers. Further, the characteristics and behaviours tend to fall within the areas of instructional strategies and classroom management and/or organization. As well, the way in which the teacher works with students is seen as important; the personal attributes of the teacher contribute to the effectiveness of the teacher's instructional strategies and classroom organization.

Instructional Strategies and/or Methods

The effective teaching research supported a task-oriented and active view of teaching that is focused on accomplishing clear objectives. Varied materials and resources are used, and lessons and assignments are interesting. Clarity of presentation is important; new information is structured for students, and cues (such as goal setting and organizers) are provided which show students not only what they are to learn, but also the ways in which the learning can be

accomplished. There is appropriate pacing of work, and students spend a maximum time engaged in productive learning. The teacher effectively models, clarifies, and questions for student understanding. Students are provided with opportunities for practice and independent work. The teacher monitors student learning and provides students with constructive feedback about their work.

Classroom Management and/or Organization

To teach effectively, the teacher is skilled in the prevention and management of inappropriate behaviour and is able to organize the classroom so that learning takes place. The teacher's expectations for appropriate behaviour are clear to students, and a system of general class procedures and structured routines is in place. Because of the procedural rules, transitions between tasks are calm, and limited time is needed to give directions to students. As a result, time spent on learning activities is maximized. Classroom management skills are linked to effective teaching strategies; the teacher models, monitors, and provides feedback to students about their behaviour as well as their schoolwork. A healthy emotional classroom climate for student learning is created.

Personal Qualities

The creation of a positive learning atmosphere is due in part to the personal and interpersonal qualities of the teacher. The teacher is seen to be intelligent and professional in approach, with strong communication and decision-making skills. The teacher appears to have a sense of efficacy and is purposeful and resourceful, demonstrating initiative and persistence. Teaching is approached with humour, energy, enthusiasm and imagination. The teacher

offers praise, support and encouragement to students, and demonstrates warmth and caring for students.

The Multiple Dimensions of Exemplary Teaching

Although effective teaching research has shown that good teaching does make a difference, teacher effectiveness models, teacher competency lists, and research on teacher effects may cause us to narrow our vision so that we miss other nuances of exemplary teaching. Process-product studies of direct and explicit instructional techniques may not reveal the attitudinal and motivational factors that relate to learning. If good teaching is solely identified by competencies and criteria that can be measured and defined operationally, then hard-to-measure aspects such as the humanistic and personal dimensions may be overlooked (Eisner, 1998). Good teaching involves creativity, imagination, values and insights, and caring and nurturing behaviours that a technical view may not fully capture (Ornstein & Lasley, 2000). There are multiple rather than singular strands that are interwoven into the fabric of teaching, and we cannot limit our conceptualization of exemplary teaching to the findings of process-product research alone.

Individual Studies and Critiques

Not surprisingly, findings from individual process-product studies on effective teaching tend to correspond to the findings of the comprehensive reviews of studies. However, some studies completed during the same period of time, or as a result of the effective teaching research, also provide specific

contextual information that illuminates and begins to extend our understanding of exemplary teaching.

The Unconventional Teacher

In an early case study Edelsky et al. (1983) described the effective practice of a teacher who held a theoretical orientation to literacy based upon a whole-language approach, rather than a skills orientation (which was much more dominant at the time and the typical focus of effective teaching research). The researchers approached the study with the assumption that the teacher and students hold beliefs, theories, and expectations and that, as the school year begins, the students begin to adapt to the teacher's orientation. The purpose of the study was to discover and describe the way in which the teacher made classroom life the way she believed it should be, based upon her theories of language learning.

Edelsky et al. (1983) found that, even on the first day of school, students were immediately able to meet the teacher's requirements to be self-directed and responsible. Further, students were successful because of the goals, values, rules, and cues that the teacher employed. The teacher's broad goals were to (a) have students see learning opportunities both in and out of school, (b) have students exercise their intellect and pique their curiosity, (c) help students appreciate and get along with others, (d) manage the day-to-day environment, (e) have students relate to and identify with the teacher, and (f) have students become reliant and confident in their own judgments. Additionally, the researchers added categories for (g) the teacher's knowledge and

understandings (which includes teacher assumptions, beliefs, and understandings about curriculum and children), and (h) implementing a whole-language writing program.

In this case study the teacher maintained particular values of respect, interdependence, independence, originality, the goodness and purposefulness of work and activity, and viewing people as good, competent, and sensible. As well, she imposed teacher rules of "do exactly as I say, use your head, do what's effective, and no cop-outs," which reflected her beliefs that students need to relate to the teacher, develop self-reliance, learn to work within the day-to-day environment, and use their intellect. In contrast to the more stereotypical role of teacher as lesson leader and the one who controls the learning process, the teacher in the study took on many roles that characterized the nature of her various kinds of interaction with students (Edelsky et al., 1983). Roles included lesson leader, information dispenser, consultant/coach, neutral recorder, preacher, and scout leader; and each role was unique in purpose, in the kind of talk that occurred, and in who initiated and controlled the interaction. The researchers concluded that from the first day forward the teacher offered students a "deal"; that is, a particular kind of classroom based upon her orientation to literacy and her beliefs and assumptions about children and curriculum. Accepting the deal meant that students would be "engaging in real-world reading and writing in projects largely under their control, often with consequences extending beyond the classroom" (p. 276). Clearly, such a

promise is based upon more than just teaching techniques but goes to the heart of what a teacher believes.

The "Master Teacher"

Amidst the call for school reform during the 1980s, there was a movement in several American states to create the rank of master teacher in the public school system (Doyle, 1985). There was a sense that schools needed to attract and retain dedicated and highly qualified teachers, and by visibly identifying and rewarding master teachers, the public system would be seen as attempting to improve. The traditional view of the master teacher as a teacher with a master's degree and five years of teaching experience was rejected in favour of identifying the master teacher by using direct assessments of classroom performance.

Doyle (1985) indicated that there are difficulties in using process-product research on effective teaching to identify master teachers. Applying the results of research in the teacher-effects paradigm means applying a list of characteristics aggregated across many studies and contexts that correlate with achievement gains. The master teacher would essentially need to fit the profile generated by the effective teaching research (see summary on pages 24-26). Yet, we know that findings will vary under different conditions (such as the lesson content, the goals and objectives, the time of year, and the nature of the classroom group), and in different social, cultural, and local circumstances. Situational and interactional factors also play a key role (Doyle, 1985). The more we study classrooms, the more we see the complexity of teaching, which has prompted a greater emphasis on decision making and adaptation as components of expertise

in teaching or on how conditions for effectiveness are maintained in complex environments such as classrooms.

The master teacher, according to Doyle (1985), is "one who is consistently able to (a) design tasks that accurately convey the curriculum to students and (b) to orchestrate these tasks successfully in the complex environments of classrooms" (p. 32). Master teachers are able to constructively adapt social and curriculum structures to specific contexts. According to Doyle, mastery resides within a knowledge base that is accessible to all teachers, and the identification of a master teacher is complex work that requires a full complement of professional judgment, not the application of limited, discreet indicators.

The "Expert Pedagogue"

Leinhardt and Greeno (1986) viewed teaching as a complex cognitive skill that rests on subject-matter knowledge and lesson structure knowledge. Each relates to the other, because subject-matter knowledge is accessed and used in lesson design and lesson design is supported and partially controlled by subject-matter knowledge. The skilled teacher's complex knowledge structure is composed of organized actions or schemata that are applied flexibly and with little cognitive effort to attain general and specific goals in the classroom. Leinhardt and Greeno proposed that "teaching is a cognitive skill that has features such as an agenda or master plan that usefully assembles goals and actions in the service of instruction" (p. 83). To confirm their supposition, Leinhardt and Greeno conducted a research study with eight successful, experienced teachers (according to the highest growth in student achievement

scores during a five-year period) and four novice teachers (in their final semester of undergraduate training).

Leinhardt and Greeno (1986) found considerable differences in the schemata of expert teachers and novice teachers. For example, experts were able to structure information and limit its complexity by breaking larger agendas down into action segments, each with its own goals, content, and knowledge base. Expert teachers had a large repertoire of routines that were consistently used, which freed the teacher to focus on the dynamics of the subject matter and the needs of the students. Leinhardt and Greeno concluded that a cognitive framework of schemata provides a starting point to understand how teachers and students deal with tasks that are ill structured and dynamic.

Berliner (1986), building upon the work of Leinhardt and Greeno (1986), has pursued the study of the "expert pedagogue." He suggested that the study of such teachers can provide important information about routines, scripts, and schema that less experienced teachers might think about as they plan instruction. According to Berliner (1986), descriptions of experts' work can serve as a "temporary scaffolding from which novices may learn to be more expert "(p. 6); they can provide us with rich case studies of performance from which we might develop a shared body of knowledge, promote thinking about expert systems in pedagogy, and foster professional pride.

However, the determination of expert teaching may not reside in years of experience. Berliner (1986) acknowledged that the terms *expert* and *experienced* are often used interchangeably (as it is difficult to separate the role that

experience plays in developing expertise), but proposed that it develops over time. Berliner suggested that expert pedagogues need to have ready access to two large domains of practical knowledge, including knowledge of subject matter and of organization and management of classrooms. Further, expert teaching is distinguished by a number of features. First, teachers hold tacit and complex knowledge about students and classrooms which influences the way in which they organize and manage the classroom, and transform subject matter. Similarly, they are able to categorize, analyze, and solve problems at a higher level than novice teachers are, such as when they diagnose the learning needs of a child and formulate several courses of action to meet those needs. They are capable of "reading a classroom"; they have fast and accurate pattern recognition abilities and a sensitivity to perceptual information, so that each time they view a classroom they are able to make accurate assessments of what is happening (Berliner, 1986). "Experts" are able to plan opportunistically and skilfully, to address the social structure of task demands (as in planning to teach in a particular facility or classroom), and to self-regulate their own metacognition (as in having plans in mind).

The "Star Teacher"

Haberman, (1991, 1995) has focused on the issue of exemplary teaching in poor, urban schools serving a large number of minority groups, and he concluded that the teacher-directed instructional methods of effective teaching, designed to lead to basic skills mastery, contribute to a pedagogy of poverty in urban schools. Instead, Haberman (1995) believed that teachers need to be

carefully selected for urban schools and that, ultimately, the best way to address the learning needs of over 12 million children and youth who live in poverty is to get better teachers for them. Haberman (1991) defined *star teachers* in terms of what their students are doing and the kind of learning environment that is created, rather than in terms of observable teacher actions.

According to Haberman (1991), students of star teachers must be involved in issues that students regard as vital and in explanations of human differences such as race, culture, religion, ethnicity, and gender. Rather than learn isolated facts, they need to be helped to see big ideas, general principles, and major concepts; and they need to be involved in planning what they will be doing and then actively involved in doing it. Real-life experiences (such as field trips, resource people, and work experiences) should provide material for analysis and reflection. Students need to work in heterogeneous groups to learn from each other, and they must be involved in applying ideals such as fairness, equity, or justice to their world. School activities should be designed to develop thinking skills; students should be asked to question assumptions, relate new ideas to old ones, or apply ideas to problems of living. Students need to be involved in polishing and perfecting their work, to see that redoing work provides an opportunity to create something worthwhile, and to excel. The use of technology for information access should involve students, and the use of autobiography can provide the basis for students to reflect on their own lives and how they have come to believe and feel as they do.

Haberman (1995) proposed that entire schools of star teachers are needed to involve students in these ways to provide an alternative to the pedagogy of poverty. Haberman's notions of effective teaching include persistence, evidenced by a belief that it is the teacher's responsibility to find a way to engage all students in learning and to constantly search for the ways that work best for each student. Teachers protect learners and learning by involving students in learning that transcends the curriculum (as in exploring a personal interest or issue). Professional learning and growth are evident in star teachers, and they are able to provide specific examples of how their own guiding principles and beliefs about teaching and learning are put into practice. The star teacher's approach to at-risk students is to look for ways to improve teaching and make the curriculum relevant, for it is believed that regardless of the students' life conditions, teachers bear the responsibility for sparking learning. They have a professional orientation to students; although they do have strong positive feelings and genuine respect for their students, it is their expectation that all students will learn from them (not necessarily love them) that makes the difference in their teaching. Star teachers recognize that students and teachers are fallible and that learning occurs through mistakes. Additionally, Haberman (1995) identified the following teaching functions as important: (a) organizational ability; (b) physical and emotional stamina; (c) a coaching, rather than a directive, teaching style; (d) recognition of student effort as part of success; (e) ability to build student rapport; and (f) the teacher's inclusive approach to the entry-level knowledge of the students in the classroom. Haberman's criteria for teaching

skills and approach to teaching are clearly very different from those identified by process-product research.

Within each of the effective teaching studies, there are teachers whose efforts led to positive learning in their students. By amassing the results of the teacher-effects research and synthesizing many studies for the common elements, we may lose sight of the nature of the good work of individual teachers. Highlighting the unconventional teacher (Edelsky et al., 1983), the "master teacher" (Doyle, 1985), the "expert pedagogue" (Berliner, 1986), or the "star teacher" (Haberman, 1991) reinforces the notion that there are multiple approaches and contexts involved in exemplary teaching. "An alternative for understanding the nature of teaching has evolved, one that combines teaching and learning processes, incorporates holistic practices, and goes beyond what teachers and students appear to be doing and inquires about what they are thinking" (Ornstein & Lasley, 2000, p. 66). Research on inquiring, reflective teaching can further inform our understanding of exemplary teaching.

Exemplary Teaching and Reflective Practice

The teacher can be viewed as an inquiring, reflective professional who reflects on his or her own beliefs about curriculum, the learner, the subject matter, and the teacher's role. Henderson (1992) suggested that there are three aspects of the inquiring reflective approach that can be considered: (a) the moral dimensions of teaching, (b) a constructivist approach, and (c) teaching as artistic problem solving. In all, we are urged to see the student's "best self" and to see students as "active participants, rather than passive recipients during the learning

process" (pp. 4-5). The relationship between the teacher and the student is interactive and interdependent.

The Moral Dimension of Teaching

Research into the moral dimensions of teaching has considered the importance of the relationship between the teacher and the students and the importance of feelings and experience in learning. When Cullingford (1995) asked students what was important to them about teachers, he found that students spoke of good teachers as mentors, where a mentor has the capacity to bring out the best in another person. "Relationships with teachers subsequently become one of the most important factors in children's learning, knowing that they have met someone who can take an interest in having a discussion, in bringing out and extending their ideas, in making them feel valued" (p 159). The relationship that is established between the teacher and the student is a critical facet of exemplary teaching.

From a moral perspective, the teacher is viewed as a facilitator, involved in cooperative practice; and the teacher's attention to attitudinal and motivational factors illuminates the humanistic side of teaching. The teacher provides support and encouragement, helps students clarify values, aids in the development of students' positive self-esteem, and helps students deal with personal issues (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995). The interplay of thinking and feeling is valued and explored, and there is dialogue or open and honest communication between the teacher and student to establish a close relationship (Henderson, 1992). Students are cared for and treated as worthwhile.

A caring relationship is a connection between two people in which one is the carer and the other the cared for, or the recipient of care (Noddings, 1992). In the teacher-learner relationship, "teachers not only have to create caring relations in which they are the carers, but that they have a responsibility to help their students develop the capacity to care" (p. 18). All students need to feel safe with their teachers; in exemplary teaching, teachers try to see and feel the world as the student sees it, to encourage and affirm the best in students, and to ultimately build a stronger position for each student.

The research of Collinson and Killeavy (1999) illuminated the nature of exemplary teaching from an ethic of care. From their studies of teachers in England, Ireland, and the United States, Collinson and Killeavy found that teachers identified as exemplary have a fundamental philosophy—that an ethic of care is the foundation of learning—for caring promotes the development and growth of others. Respect is shown for the ability of each student to achieve and meet scholastic expectations; each child must progress, regardless of his or her background. A knowing and respectful relationship with the students is vital for the students' best learning and a prerequisite for effective teaching. Although teacher competencies and student test scores are easily measured or described (compared to the ethics of care and respect), Collinson and Killeavy suggested that our attention might be better directed to considering an ethic of care as a motivation for teacher competency.

A Constructivist Approach to Teaching

In my study I take the view that knowledge is socially constructed, not something that resides in the teacher-as-expert that needs to be transmitted to the student. Further, I take a learner-centred view that emphasizes the role of the learner in constructing knowledge. Such views are consistent with the literature on constructivist teaching. A constructivist teaching approach considers the thinking of the teachers and the students and sees learning as a complex interaction of the students' past experiences, personal purposes, and the subject matter. Brooks and Grennon-Brooks (1999) described constructivism as "a theory of learning that describes the central role that learners' ever-transforming mental schemes play in their cognitive growth " (p. 18). The student constructs new knowledge and meaning by building or constructing upon what is already known or understood. The student's point of view is sought and valued, and learning is advanced through a curriculum that is relevant to the student. Broad concepts are introduced holistically, to which relevant parts are attached. Lessons challenge students to examine previous experiences and ideas as the basis for new constructions of meaning.

Shulman (1987) noted, "Our exemplary teachers present ideas in order to provoke the constructive processes of their students and not to incur student dependence on teachers or to stimulate the flatteries of imitation" (pp. 13-14). Critical thinking skills can be taught, and teachers try "to teach students to examine what they are thinking about, to make distinctions and comparisons, to see errors in what they are thinking about and how they are thinking about it, and

to make self-corrections" (Ornstein, 1991, p. 17). Through the processes of conversation and dialogue, knowledge is created and negotiated, thinking strategies are developed, and higher-order problems are solved (Hogan & Pressley, 1997). Constructivist teachers are concerned with the critical thinking of their students, and they try to make students aware of their own metacognition processes.

Henderson (1996) outlined a protocol for four constructivist enactments in the classroom. First, constructivist teachers plan, act, observe, and evaluate as part of a fluid planning cycle. Constructivist teachers adapt curriculum materials to reflect their beliefs about teaching and learning and plan in an exploratory and experimental spirit. Second, through a process of inquiry learning, constructivist teachers guide students to create meaning; knowledge is transacted, rather than transmitted. Third, the constructivist teacher is involved in perception-based participant observation in which the teacher observes student behaviours, verbal expressions, and other indicators to try to understand what the student is thinking and feeling and how the student is constructing meaning. Finally, the use of authentic assessment practices helps constructivist teachers to plan their teaching and learning transactions, to monitor student growth, and to enable students to control their learning. Authentic assessments reflect classroom activities that are connected with, and relevant to, the world outside of the classroom.

Teaching Style and Artistic Problem Solving

The manner of the teacher is a consideration of exemplary practice. Ornstein (1991) noted that teacher effectiveness research provides us with a "vocabulary and system for improving our insight into good teaching" (p. 78) as well as the knowledge that teacher differences exist and that teachers make a difference. At the same time, although it is obvious that there are certain behaviours that contribute to good teaching, it is difficult to say which behaviours or methods are most important. Often the teacher's style is the critical issue, for teaching style influences how teacher effectiveness research is used:

> Every teacher has a special way of doing things and a special way of thinking—a manner or style that helps characterize who he or she is. Teaching style is a composite of personality and philosophy, evidenced by behaviour and attitude, what the teacher emphasizes, how he or she reacts to different situations. (p. 72)

What works with one teacher, may not work for another teacher.

According to Fenstermacher (1986), the teacher's manner "is as much a part of the content to be conveyed to the student as the facts, theories, arguments, and insights of the subject being taught" (p. 47). The manner of the teacher contributes to both the moral development of the student and the nature of the discipline that is being studied:

> One must not only possess and exhibit the manner of an educator, writ large, but also the manner that best accords with the specific content areas one is opening up to students. This manner consists primarily of moral and intellectual virtues pertinent to education. (p. 47)

Such virtues might include fairness, respect, openness, honesty, creativity, reflectivity, and humility, to name just a few. Fenstermacher proposed a manner

of teaching in which a student is provided with the means to structure his or her own experiences, develop a capacity for autonomous and authentic action, and establish the student's sense of place in history. The teacher does not supply the knowledge and beliefs, but supplies the means to gain access to and continue the enlargement of knowledge and understanding. Fenstermacher contended that the teacher must possess the manner of a liberated scholar to serve as a model for learners on their way to becoming students.

The notion of an exemplary teaching style has been referred to as artistry. When teaching is approached from an artistic, problem-solving perspective, it can be sensitive, intelligent, and creative, with student learning that can be aesthetically enjoyable, provocative, and interesting (Henderson, 1992). The teacher, as artist, is viewed as one who continuously adapts the curriculum to the students' backgrounds, interests, and needs. Quality education involves teacher judgment, flexibility, and imagination. Eisner (1998) also suggested that exemplary teaching is artistry, where a teacher applies judgment of the situation and shows a particularity of perception to move beyond the limitations of generalized responses. Such teachers "have a broad repertoire of moves with which to quickly and gracefully act on the situation that they see" (p. 200). Practical knowledge, interactive thinking, decision making, past experiences, and more combine with an understanding of students and the classroom context to enable a teacher to read a situation, then act upon it. Sarason (1999) indicated that artistry is not a formula, but that you know it when you see it. Although a teacher has standards and values, the artistry is in having the student "see those

standards and values as his or her own, not something demanded, not something verbally expressed, and to which there is a superficial, conforming response, but rather an assimilation into the learner's psychological bloodstream" (p. 144). Because of the teacher, the student's relationship with the subject matter is significantly altered, and learning becomes engaging and meaningful.

Exemplary Teaching in Relationship to Learning

My conceptual framework supports a learner-centred view in which exemplary teaching forms part of an interactive relationship with the learner. Harris (1999) concurred, noting that the essence of exemplary teaching lies not in what a teacher does, but in the quality of learning experienced by students. Common (1991) indicated that "the proper measure of expertise in teaching is found not in what teachers do, rather in what their students do because of their teaching" (p. 185). Further, "the expert pedagogue's traits are significant in their relational quality. Traits such as subject matter knowledge or regard for students are significant only if they contribute *to the creation of an educational relationship between teachers and students*" (p. 185). Teaching is not a solitary act, but one that exists in its relationship to students.

Macrorie (1984) provided descriptions of 20 exemplary teachers. He approached his research believing that certain principles and methods help learning more than others do, but rather than look for exemplary teachers, he looked for teachers whose students did good works. Macrorie termed teachers who do good works *enablers* and found that there is a humanity and universality in what enablers do: Enablers share similar attitudes and principles and work in

similar ways. Enablers focus on good work by having expectations and faith in their students to do good work, arranging the learning space for the creation of good work, and sharing good works with them and between students. Learners are challenged to use their imagination, take risks, and make choices. Enablers ensure that learning is relevant and meaningful, so that through the students' seeing and experience, learning becomes alive and part of the student's conscious/unconscious selves. Rigor, spontaneity, humour, joy, support, and encouragement are valued, as is the power of storytelling and truthtelling that challenges and excites. From the 20 studies of good work arose the metaphor of the Moebian loop, fusing polar opposites such as the individual and the group, dependence and independence, freedom and discipline, subjectivity and objectivity, emotion and reasoning, and particulars and generals (Macrorie, 1984). The enabling teacher is able to mediate the complexities of the Moebian loop so that both exemplary learning and teaching occur.

Brown and McIntyre (1993) completed research into teachers' craft knowledge and provided insights into the thoughts of teachers identified as *good teachers*. They consistently found that the teachers in their study talked about their success in teaching only in relationship to the work of their students:

> Notable for its absence was any suggestion that teacher's success could be judged simply in terms of the quality of what they did; their lucidity in explaining, the humour of their acting, their sensitivity to pupil needs or the enthusiasm with which a subject was projected was never in itself a cause for positive evaluation. (p. 111)

Teachers judged their teaching in terms of desirable student activity during particular phases and types of lessons.

Sotto (1994) noted that there is little research that has shown that one method of teaching is better than another, and that although the skills and competencies of the teacher are important, the focus should be on the learner's learning. Clark (1995) expressed it by saying that "the heart of good teaching is getting something insatiable started in the minds and hearts of others and then getting out of the way" (p. 66). In exemplary teaching it is possible to do just that.

Exemplary Teaching of Language Arts

With the teacher and learner there is another relational point in the triadic nature of teaching, and that is the content or subject area. A critical goal of the elementary school language arts program is the development of literacy skills in students. In Alberta the Program of Studies for Language Arts indicates that the aim of the program is "to enable each student to understand and appreciate language, and to use it confidently and competently in a variety of situations for communication, personal satisfaction and learning" (Alberta Learning, 1999, p. 3). In the elementary grades students are required to listen and speak, read and write, and view and represent in order to achieve the curriculum's learning outcomes. A student's ability to read and write tends to provide a foundation not only for the other aspects of the language arts curriculum, but also for the successful achievement of a large portion of the entire school curriculum. A teacher of language arts is, in practice, a teacher of reading and writing whose students acquire the literacy skills that will enable them to be successful in their learning.

Meaning-Centred Approaches to Teaching Language Arts

The Alberta language arts curriculum is written to support meaning-centred approaches to the teaching of language arts. Students are required to "(a) explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences; (b) comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts; (c) manage ideas and information; (d) enhance the clarity and artistry of communication; and (e) respect, support and collaborate with others" (Alberta Learning, 1999, p. 5). The general outcomes are interrelated and interdependent, and for each general outcome there are specific learning outcomes, all of which require students to listen, speak, read, write, view, and represent. No one area of language arts is taught in isolation. Authorized student resources to support the curriculum include anthologies and collections of literature in thematic units. Teaching resources include books on a range of topics such as creating an integrated curriculum, reading and writing strategies, authentic assessment, literature-based instruction, thematic learning, balanced literacy, teaching metacognition strategies, the use of technology, and reflective learning. In essence, the language arts curriculum in Alberta is written as an integrated program of studies, and the authorized resources support a teaching approach designed to engage students in meaningful and authentic reading and writing activities. Thus, the way in which Alberta's language arts curriculum is written conveys a preference for teaching strategies that are holistic, interrelated, and meaning centred.

In their efforts to improve teaching and to reform schools, school jurisdictions, school boards, or entire states or provinces may mandate particular

strategies or approaches to teaching and learning that are believed will improve student achievement results. Such is the case in Kentucky, where literacy instruction has shifted from a traditional skills-based instructional program to an integrated curriculum that emphasizes a meaning-centered, integrated approach to teaching reading and writing. Prior to reform efforts, "instruction was teacher centered and skills based. Students in each grade were expected to achieve relatively standard sets of grade-level expectations and spent large portions of the school day engaged in systematic skills instruction" (Cantrell, 1998, p. 370). Now, primary teachers have been mandated to work with students in multi-age/multi-ability groups and to use developmentally appropriate approaches for active student involvement, interaction, and exploration.

As the reforms were implemented, there was considerable interest in investigating the association between the use of the recommended approaches and students' writing and reading achievement, and in ascertaining whether an integrated curriculum and meaning-centered approach were successful (Cantrell, 1998). One of the studies involved four teachers identified as high implementers of the recommended practices and four teachers identified as low implementers (who continued to use traditional methods). The study provided descriptions of classroom practice that resulted in positive student learning and indicated that this was accomplished through the implementation of a comprehensive literacy program that balanced meaningful, motivating, and open-ended reading and writing activities with elements of explicit skills instruction (Cantrell, 1998).

Cantrell (1998) found that all of the teachers in the study who were considered to be successful used a wide range of children's literature and structured their classrooms so that students were engaged in reading and writing activities for extended periods of time. Teachers read to students, asked open-ended questions about stories, designed projects related to books, and used books to prompt student writing activities. Students read and discussed books in small and large groups and with partners, and were involved in reading activities at various times throughout the day. Students were grouped for instruction as needed, with flexible, within-class, mixed-ability groups that changed according to student needs. Explicit skill instruction was provided as needed within the flexible groupings.

Open-ended writing activities that involved students in higher-level writing skills (rather than worksheets or blackboard copying) were an important feature of the teachers' literacy instruction. Journal writing in response to prompts and writing within other content areas in response to open-ended questions allowed students to increase their writing proficiency. Teachers reported that student work was compiled in writing portfolios and that writing reflected different styles, such as letters, poems, persuasive writing, and stories. Students were also taught to evaluate their own writing according to specific criteria and to reflect on their writing in terms of models or rubrics shared by the teacher. Although on occasion skills (such as spelling and language mechanics) were taught in isolation, the successful teachers in the study typically provided skills instruction during the context of reading and writing activities. Cantrell (1998) concluded that

the successful teachers in the study provided the foundation for higher literacy learning through their use of a balanced approach to literacy instruction that focused on the needs of their students.

Studies of Exemplary Language Arts Teaching

There is considerable interest in research that describes and illuminates the nature of exemplary teaching of language arts in the primary grades. One such study was designed to gain an understanding of the nature of outstanding primary-level literacy instruction (Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997). In this study it was found that in exemplary teaching, teachers used an instructionally balanced approach, varying whole-class, small-group, and individual work. The researchers also found that all teachers integrated explicit skill instruction with opportunities to read and write whole, authentic texts. Wharton-McDonald et al. summarized the characteristics of exemplary first grade literacy teachers, noting that such teachers have a strong awareness of purpose, of what they want to accomplish, and of how they want to accomplish it. They hold high expectations for the achievement and behaviour of all students. Classroom management is masterful, and the control of time, materials, and student behaviours is handled with such finesse that it is hardly noticed. Instructional balance, which uses a range and variety of teaching strategies and approaches, is demonstrated. Teachers also demonstrate instructional density, where multiple goals are woven into single lessons, or strands from different lessons are woven to form coherent and meaningful instruction. There is a thorough integration of reading and writing activities. In exemplary teaching an extensive use of scaffolding is employed,

enabling students to progress with the right amount of assistance and develop into self-regulated learners.

Another study, which builds on the earlier work of Wharton-McDonald et al. (1997), was conducted to look at the characteristics of exemplary first-grade literacy instruction and to capture as many dimensions of exemplary teaching as possible (Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley, 1999). The purpose of the research was twofold: (a) to learn from the modeling of exemplary teachers, and (b) to study exemplary teachers' practices and beliefs to provide insight from experts regarding language arts approaches (such as constructivist, balanced, and explicit).

Teacher interviews showed that the exemplary teachers believed in holistic practices, with literacy programs designed around themes (such as poetry, authors, or story structures) and integrated with other content areas. The exemplary teachers advocated strong programs for skill development and well-designed instruction. They believed that skills were best developed within a context, then reinforced as opportunities arose. The teachers strongly believed in meeting individual student's needs and in providing instruction within small, flexible groups based upon specific needs. A positive, supportive classroom climate that was motivating to students was seen as important, as was the partnership of the home and school in students' literacy development. Morrow et al. (1999) found that the teachers' beliefs and philosophies were put into practice.

The extremely strong presence of thematic studies and cross-curricular connections was one of the most outstanding characteristics of the exemplary teachers' programs. The teachers said that the use of themes made learning interesting and meaningful and that they were continually adding new songs, stories, and poems, as well as art, science, social studies, and math activities to their thematic units and studies of special days and events. In summary, Morrow et al. (1999) found that the teachers held and articulated philosophies of how children learn and consciously based their classrooms on their philosophies. Early literacy instruction included explicit skill development within the context of authentic literature and content areas and the social collaboration and problem solving associated with an integrated language arts approach. Traditional direct instruction was used as well as constructivist models of learning; the explicit teaching of skills was foundational to the constructivist activities, which then led to the consolidation and elaboration of skills. Morrow et al. concluded that "exemplary teaching involves a great deal of knowledge, experience, and expertise" and that the teachers in the study "exemplify the very best that first-grade literacy instruction can offer" (p. 476). They proposed that much can be learned by studying the enthusiasm, dedication, hard work, beliefs, and practices of exemplary teachers.

Comparative Studies

Similar findings were corroborated by a related study in which the goal of the research was to determine whether there are teaching practices that distinguish outstanding primary-level teachers of literacy from typical teachers of

literacy (Pressley et al., 1998). The researchers selected five different schools (serving students from a diversity of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds) in five different American states. At each site school officials nominated both outstanding and typical first-grade teachers for the study, who participated in classroom observations and interviews. Through prolonged study, the researchers were able to construct case descriptions of each school's most outstanding teacher. Pressley et al. found nine characteristics that distinguished the successful classrooms in the study:

1. high academic engagement and competence
2. excellent classroom management
3. positive, reinforcing, cooperative environment
4. explicit teaching of skills
5. literature emphasis
6. much reading and writing
7. match of accelerating demands to student competence, and scaffolding
8. encouragement of self-regulation
9. strong connections across the curriculum

A key finding that emerged from the study is that excellent language arts teaching is complicated. "Until we recognize and honor this complexity, it seems unlikely that we will ever make much progress toward dramatically increasing the supply of exemplary primary grade teachers" (Pressley et al., 1998, p. 22). Excellent teachers are not bound by the use of any one model of instruction, but

select the practices that work well. "There is no single magic bullet that develops effective literacy, but rather that learning strategies and skills, metacognition, content knowledge and motivation work in interaction" (p. 19). Although various components can be identified and singled out for discussion, it is the complex interaction of elements that distinguishes exemplary teaching.

A large study (with 299 participants) has also compared the teaching practices of exemplary teachers of literacy with teachers not so identified (Wray et al., 2000). The research results provide insight into the differences between primary and elementary classrooms, as well as the differences between exemplary literacy teachers and a validation sample of teachers not so identified. As might be expected, activities for primary students involved more of the kinds of activities that young children need to start the work of reading and writing. Reading activities included the use of big books, explicit skill instruction in letter sounds and names, sequencing activities, flashcards for vocabulary practice, phonics activities, and the involvement of other adults in reading. Writing instruction included handwriting practice, copying words, and sounding out spelling. In both primary and elementary grades the exemplary teachers differed from the validation sample teachers in their ability to develop students' skills through a wider range of teaching activities and through their use of whole texts (Wray et al., 2000). In exemplary teaching, skill development was embedded within the context of where those skills would be used. Lessons were focused and typically contained more than two tasks. Time on task was closely observed, with expectations clearly in place for what was to be accomplished at each stage

of the lesson and during work periods. Teachers monitored student progress and provided ongoing opportunities for teacher or peer feedback of work in progress. A distinct characteristic of exemplary teaching was the extensive use of modeling of what students were to produce and of the processes involved in learning. Attention to the thought processes of students was evident in the kinds of questions that teachers asked the class, groups of students, or individuals. Exemplary teachers "more frequently asked children how they accomplished tasks, how they made literary decisions, what reading cues they used and to explain conclusions and comprehension decisions" (p. 80). All of the exemplary teachers asked questions of this type when reading individually with students, thus providing scaffolds or supports for the development of the children's higher-level thinking.

In general, the research of Wray et al. (2000) showed that there are common characteristics that distinguish exemplary literacy teaching. Wray et al. pointed out two key findings. First, teachers are explicit in modeling and demonstrating the purposes and processes of reading and writing, thus encouraging a "mindful" approach to the literacy learning of their pupils. Second, teachers teach "a range of literacy skills and knowledge, at word, sentence and text levels, within the context of work on shared texts" (p. 81), then assist students to make active connections between each of the levels of knowledge. Literacy instruction becomes a process of constructing meaning.

Summary of Exemplary Language Arts Practices

There is consistency in the research (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000), regarding the nature of exemplary practice in teaching reading and writing and the implicit theories that seem to underlie the teachers' approaches. The exemplary practice of language arts teachers appears to be distinguished by the following characteristics:

1. A literacy-rich learning environment is created. Reading and writing materials are visible, plentiful, and accessible to students. The classrooms are positive places where students are motivated and excited about learning and are actively engaged in productive activities that help them learn. The supportive climate of the classroom is fostered by exemplary teachers who are visibly dedicated, hard working, and enthusiastic. Through teacher modeling, students learn to speak respectfully, be helpful, and work cooperatively with others. Teachers provide constructive and reinforcing feedback for student accomplishments and give students the support and security they need to take risks in their learning. Positive classroom environments address the affective needs of students and promote positive self-esteem.

2. Class management and organization is apparent. The physical environment is organized to support learning, and consistent and clear expectations for student learning and behaviour within that environment are established. A system of procedural routines and rules is in place, and students are taught how to use the classroom materials, how to interact appropriately with

others, and how to become independent, self-regulated learners. To foster appropriate student behaviour, a preventative approach is adopted, with good teaching that actively engages students. Discipline tends to be private and low-key, and off-task individuals are redirected to learning tasks. Teachers exhibit a quality of "with-it-ness" in which they are aware of each student in the class. They monitor and coordinate time, materials, and student behaviour with finesse.

3. Teachers have expectations and hold students accountable; they have clear expectations of purpose, of what they what they want to accomplish and of how they want to accomplish it. Similarly, they hold high expectations for all of their students' learning and behaviour, and students are held accountable for meeting those expectations. The teachers' use of higher-level questions not only checks for understanding, but also provides insight into the way in which the student is processing ideas and constructing meaning. The teacher accelerates learning by providing an appropriate level of expectation and challenge for each student and actively monitors and records student progress

4. Teachers meet individual needs and engage students in learning. They are concerned about engaging students in appropriate and meaningful learning activities and in meeting the learning needs of their students. Preventative planning and strong instructional skills ensure that students are engaged in meaningful work.

5. Excellent instructional strategies are used. Exemplary teaching is characterized by the teachers' expertise in teaching an instructionally balanced language arts program. They employ a wide range of appropriate instructional

strategies that integrate reading and writing. Literacy skills are developed both within language arts and through cross-curricular connections.

6. Skills are taught explicitly and in multiple ways. Skill instruction may occur as a mini-lesson, integrated with the reading of literature and authentic texts or during writing activities, embedded in content, or taught spontaneously when the need arises or the opportunity presents itself. Teachers employ a large repertoire of strategies along a continuum, from direct skill instruction at times, to whole language approaches. Externally produced skills worksheets are seldom used, because teachers prefer to teach skills within the context of authentic literature or curriculum content materials, or materials of their own design.

7. A meaning-centred approach is used. A belief that language arts is effectively taught in integrated and meaningful contexts is evidenced by the ways in which teachers organize their classrooms and work with students and by the positive gains seen in students' reading and writing achievement. Literacy teachers illustrate instructional density, making connections across content areas or weaving strands of learning from various areas together to form new meanings. They provide an appropriate level of challenge so that students experience continuous improvement and the right amount of support as scaffolds to new learning. A common feature of all of the exemplary teaching in the studies is the extensive use of authentic literature as a core resource for teaching reading and writing.

8. A constructivist approach is apparent. The studies illustrated that in exemplary literacy teaching, strategies are used that promote the constructive

thought processes of students. The teachers in the studies were concerned with the critical thinking of their students, and they tried to make students aware of their own metacognition processes. They asked students how they made their decisions and what reading cues they used, and to explain conclusions. The teachers modeled their own thinking processes for students and talked about what they were thinking as they worked through tasks. They helped students to have a mindful approach to the processes of reading and writing (Wray et al., 2000). As constructivist teachers who mediated students' learning, they effectively blended the *what* of learning, with the *how* of learning (Brooks & Grennon-Brooks, 1999). They provided enough support to encourage risk taking and enough challenge to scaffold new learning. Literacy teaching was integrated and holistic.

The studies (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000) provided current research into the practice of exemplary language arts teaching. To some extent the studies also illuminated the thinking behind the actions, or the teachers' knowledge that is expressed through their teaching.

Teacher Knowledge

Research in the area of teacher knowledge specifically considers the knowledge base for teaching: what teachers know and how that knowledge is enacted in their teaching. During the educational reform efforts of the 1980s, attention was focused on improving teaching by using the results of effective teaching research and also by more clearly defining teaching as a profession.

Standards for judging and raising the performance of teachers were to be clearly defined and articulated, and the assumption was made that teaching must rest on a professional knowledge base of codified knowledge, skills, understandings, and ethics (Shulman, 1987). Teachers were not viewed as possessing professional knowledge; knowledge as gained through process-product research was seen as more objective and valued above personal and practical knowledge. Efforts to define the knowledge base for teaching initiated and renewed researchers' interests in what teachers know or need to know to be successful teachers. Research on teacher knowledge looks at both the formal knowledge base for teaching and, increasingly, at the teachers' practical knowledge and how that practical knowledge is expressed in the context of the classroom. According to Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986), teachers have a substantive body of knowledge, and researchers underscore the critical role of teachers' knowledge in teaching "by showing how teachers use their personal and practical knowledge to resolve tensions, manage dilemmas, and simplify the complexities of their work" (p. 514). Research in the area of teacher knowledge has now emphasized the importance and value of teachers' practical knowledge and expertise.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Shulman (1987) indicated that good teaching is not just a matter of personal style, applying effective teaching results, knowing the subject, and communicating with students. Expert teaching encompasses a wisdom of practice that is a combination of subject matter understanding and pedagogical skill adapted to the characteristics of the students. It is a complex act that rests

on an elaborate knowledge base of ethical, theoretical, empirical, and practical principles that is far richer than the results of effective teaching research.

Shulman's (1987) knowledge base for teaching provides a conceptual framework from which teacher knowledge in my study has been conceptualized. The knowledge base includes (a) content knowledge, (b) general pedagogical knowledge, (c) curriculum knowledge, (d) pedagogical content knowledge, (e) knowledge of learners and their characteristics, (f) knowledge of educational contexts, and (g) knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values. The key to the knowledge base is pedagogical content knowledge, or the capacity of a teacher to transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variations in ability and background presented by the student" (p. 15). Pedagogical content knowledge embodies the other categories of knowledge, with particular emphasis on the pedagogical relationship between the subject matter and the learner and on the pedagogical reasoning that enables the teacher to transform what is known and understood by the teacher into new understandings for teacher and students. Pedagogical content knowledge characterizes a transformative way of thinking about and representing the subject matter (through the most powerful illustrations, analogies, demonstrations, and explanations) that facilitates its comprehension and understanding by others. Although separating the areas of knowledge may be useful for purposes of analysis, in practice, teachers' knowledge functions "as an organized whole, orienting the teacher to her situation and allowing her to act" (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986, p. 513).

Shulman cautioned that an analysis of the knowledge base for teaching should not leave the impression that teaching is the transmission of knowledge, but should illuminate the complex nature of teacher knowledge that leads to student learning.

Shulman (1987) viewed teaching as "comprehension and reasoning, as transformation and reflection" (p. 13), with pedagogical reasoning and action at the heart of quality teaching:

> When we examine the quality of teaching, the idea of influencing the grounds or reasons for teachers' decisions places the emphasis precisely where it belongs: on the features of pedagogical reasoning that lead to or can be invoked to explain pedagogical actions. (p. 13)

Shulman provided a model of pedagogical reasoning and action with the following components: (a) comprehension of purpose and subject matter; (b) transformation, through preparation, representation, selection, and adaptation; (c) instruction, or the observable forms of classroom teaching; (d) evaluation of student and teacher performance; (e) reflection, to review, reconstruct, and analyze; and (f) new comprehensions, of purpose and subject matter; of students, teaching, and self; and new understandings and learnings from experiences. Through the process of pedagogical reasoning and action, the teacher transforms, through instruction, something known and understood by the teacher into new comprehensions for both the student and teacher. Pedagogical reasoning occurs throughout active teaching, so that teaching itself is a stimulus for thoughtfulness and action. Shulman cautioned that delineating the knowledge base for teaching should not lead to "a technical image of teaching, a scientific enterprise that has lost its soul" (p. 20). As well, the model of reasoning and

action is not intended to be prescriptive and linear, but representative of the capacity needed by teachers to engage both knowledge and action.

Shulman (1987) suggested that there are at least four sources for the teaching knowledge base, including scholarship in the content discipline, educational materials and structures that advance organized schooling (such as curricula and school jurisdictions), and formal educational scholarship and literature on the processes of schooling, teaching, and learning. The fourth source, teachers' wisdom of practice, is noteworthy as a source of codifiable practical pedagogical knowledge. In exemplary teaching, teachers actively engage a complex practical knowledge base integral to the teaching profession that is worthy of further description. Case studies of exemplary teaching practice can provide descriptions and analyses of teachers' wisdom of practice as an expression of their knowledge.

Metaphoric Expressions of Exemplary Teaching

Metaphoric language, or images of teaching expressed metaphorically, can aid in our understanding of exemplary teaching practices as a reflection of teacher thinking and knowing. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggested that our conceptual understandings are framed as metaphors, so that "metaphors as linguistic expression are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system" (p. 6). Further, "human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical" (p. 6), and metaphors arise from our beliefs. Van Manen (1990) went further, saying that "virtually every word we utter ultimately derives from some image, thereby betraying its metaphoric genesis. Our most prized

certainties, our best proven ideas, our most neglected commonplaces must admit to their metaphoric genealogy" (p. 48). Metaphors can be used to illustrate our cognitive frames or conceptual systems and create an image for how we understand our experiences

Gudmundsdottir and Saabar (1991) have used metaphors to convey the essential elements of good teaching, and they proposed that teachers in the United States can be viewed as skilled performers with subject matter knowledge, schema, scripts, agendas, and improvisation. Such teachers know their subject matter and are able to explain, illustrate, and represent it to their students. Metaphorically speaking, they employ schemas to assimilate new information, scripts to effectively teach lessons and units, and agendas to hold the activities purposefully together. Good teachers maintain classroom discipline and keep students on task. As skilled performers with solid craft knowledge, they exhibit artistry, imagination, and the ability and sensitivity to improvise in response to their audience, their students.

Claudet and Ellet (1990) proposed that teaching behaviours are influenced by the metaphors that teachers use to conceptualize their teaching. Their study investigated the specific teaching/learning metaphors held by teachers and the extent to which the metaphors were reflected in the robustness of the classroom and the quality of teacher performance in the classroom. Highly robust classrooms are those in which there is a high degree of involvement in student learning, with an equally high degree of student effort in maintaining high performance. The classroom atmosphere is comfortable, with students actively

engaged in their learning. In robust classrooms teachers hold high expectations for students, view students as trustworthy, and tend to be humanistic rather than coercive. They display a sense of humour, are flexible, and are likely to respond openly to student questions, pursuing a student's line of thought. Claudet and Ellet found that teachers in the robust classrooms employed an ensemble of metaphors with the teacher as (a) supporter, helper, and facilitator; (b) monitor, prober, and assessor; and (c) challenger and motivator.

Tobin and Fraser (1991) explored teachers' conceptualizations of their roles and found that beliefs and metaphors were used by teachers to make sense of their teaching roles. They found that depending upon the teachers' perceptions of the context in which learning is to occur, teachers switch metaphors, thus throwing different sets of beliefs, and different actions, into effect. "The metaphor used to make sense of a role is a master switch for teachers' associated belief sets" (p. 234). At any time a teacher might believe that it is best to be a "captain of the ship," "entertainer," "gardener," or "police officer." In their studies of exemplary teachers Tobin and Fraser found a diversity of teaching practices and recommended that researchers resist the temptation to search for the particular strategies that should be adopted by successful teachers or to oversimplify the complexity of exemplary teaching. They suggested that "studies of teachers identified as exemplary are fertile grounds for learning about teaching and learning" (p. 232) and can act as springboards for reflections on improving practice. My study was conceived in that spirit, and in the following

chapter I outline the way in which I designed my study to address my fundamental question of understanding how exemplary teaching works.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

Interpretive Inquiry

This study involved three teacher participants and can be understood as qualitative case study research. It was conducted as an interpretive inquiry that is both descriptive and heuristic. Peshkin (1993) indicated that the "generative promise" (or outcome) of qualitative research might be description, interpretation, verification, or evaluation. Description involves the accurate, sensitive, and comprehensive rendering of people, processes, relationships, setting, situations, and systems. The outcomes of interpretation may include (a) the development of new concepts; (b) the provision of insights that change behaviour, refine knowledge, or identify problems; (c) the creation of generalizations; (d) the development of theory; and (e) the clarification and understanding of complexity. In my study a comprehensive and accurate description of the exemplary teaching practice of three elementary school language arts teachers is foundational to interpretation. The design of the study anticipates the generative promise that, through interpretation, we can gain insight into how exemplary teaching works. In relying upon a descriptive, interpretive approach, the research was purposefully open ended to allow a holistic discernment of the complex nature of exemplary teaching.

Throughout the research I remained focused on my entry question, "How does exemplary teaching work?" Although the research was emergent in nature,

relying upon predispositions and guiding questions reflective of a conceptual framework that continued to develop in the field, I remained true to my view of teaching as multifaceted and complex, and more than the sum of its parts. Thus, I considered the parts and the whole, where each facet of exemplary teaching is significant both individually and as a facet of the total textual structure. The study was naturalistic, taking place in the field; it describes and interprets the exemplary teaching practice of teachers, working within the context of their classrooms. I used multiple methods for gathering data, and these ways were interactive and humanistic.

In my analysis I worked inductively, moving from the particular to the more general, with a reliance on "reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative, moving back and forth between the parts and the whole" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 10). The research process was congruent with a view of knowledge that is neither linear nor straightforward, but iterative, building upon itself; it can be generated, enhanced, built, and uncovered. In this way the research process was "*heuristic—a discovering experience*" (p. 18). I also remained open to the possibility that metaphoric language and imagery might be apparent in the data or used in expressive language to describe exemplary teaching.

Case Study Approach

A case study approach, with three teacher participants, was selected as most appropriate to investigate the research problem. Merriam (1988) indicated four areas of consideration in selecting a case study approach:

1. the amount of control, where the research is not experimental in design, and no treatment is manipulated;
2. the desired end product, which is envisioned as a "holistic, intensive description and interpretation of a contemporary phenomenon" (p. 9);
3. whether a *bounded system* is the focus of the investigation, such as the examination of a specific phenomenon which might be a "program, an event, a person, a process, an institution or a social group" (p. 9); or
4. the nature of a concern or issue, because a case might "be selected because it is itself intrinsically interesting, and one would study it to achieve as full an understanding of the phenomenon as possible" (p. 10).

A case study with multiple individual cases addressed the research purpose, because I tried to understand the practice or phenomenon of exemplary teaching as an expression of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, within the bounded situation of a particular subject area (the elementary language arts curriculum) and in each particular classroom. Multiple data sources were collected over a period of time. As a result, the outcome of the research is a holistic description and interpretation of exemplary teaching practice as an expression of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge.

Conceptualization of Teacher Knowledge

In an interpretive inquiry the conceptual framework continues to evolve as the research is conducted. In Chapter One I outlined a framework from which my research was conceptualized, and I introduced the notion of knowledge as

phronesis; that is, practical knowledge or practical wisdom (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996). Practical knowledge is perceptual, with conceptual knowledge used as a guide. It requires an understanding of general principles and theories (epistemic knowledge) but enables one to perceive the particular details of each case or situation, and then to act responsively and flexibly. With accumulated experiences and the familiarity gained through the ongoing process of perceiving, assessing, and acting, perceptions lead to insight. Thus, the teacher's practical knowledge is open and flexible to allow action in imprecise situations.

There is considerable research on teacher knowledge. For example, Clandinin and Connelly (1987) viewed teacher knowledge and action as personal practical knowledge that is embodied and experiential; Grimmett and MacKinnon (1992) saw craft knowledge as contextualized knowledge that combines pedagogical content knowledge and pedagogical learner knowledge. These perspectives fall within the realm of practical knowledge and illustrate the complex nature of describing and understanding what teachers know. In Chapter Two I review Shulman's (1987) knowledge base for teaching, the key to which is pedagogical content knowledge. This "wisdom of practice" links teachers' practical knowledge with the content or text of a subject matter so that the teachers' understandings can be transformed to student understanding. From the vantage point of time (since I first began reading the literature and designing my study) and through the ongoing process of collecting and analyzing data, I have continued to revisit and refine my conceptual framework. Although my research design purposefully avoids the imposition of any kind of predetermined schemata

or categorization on the data, I have found Shulman's conception of teacher knowledge to be the one that best frames my study. In particular, the notion of pedagogical content knowledge provides a perspective to frame the shifting, triadic interplay of teacher, student, and content area and to further my understanding of teacher knowledge as expressed through exemplary teaching in language arts.

Selection of Participants

Three teachers, each identified as having exemplary practices in teaching language arts, were selected for the study and, as such, represented a nonrandom, purposeful sample. The three participants are elementary school teachers from a large urban school district, and their selection was based on principal nominations, where principals were agreeable to having the research conducted in their schools. Elementary school principals were asked to nominate exemplary language arts teachers who (a) demonstrated outstanding teaching abilities; (b) achieved success in student learning; (c) fostered student enthusiasm and engagement; and (d) exemplified outstanding qualities of the teaching profession. Because the study was designed to explore as many dimensions of exemplary teaching as possible, an attempt was made to select teachers who might bring different facets of teaching (such as different grade levels, different socioeconomic levels of schools, and varied years of teaching experience) to the study. From the nominations, and after an initial phone call and school visit to discern interest and compatibility (with the research design and conceptualization), I selected three teachers as prospective participants. I

provided prospective participants with a letter that outlined the research and the nature of the participants' involvement and asked for their participation (see Appendix A). Informed consent was obtained from each of the three participants

Data Collection

The collection of data occurred over a period of three months, at times mutually agreeable to the participants and me. Data were collected primarily through taped interviews, ongoing conversations with each teacher throughout the study, and observations in each teacher's classroom. The research design was flexible to accommodate other data sources such as teacher plans, reviews of teaching and learning resources, and/or materials where such data might inform the study and be agreeable to the participant. A comfortable relationship was established with each participant so that substantial data, which illuminate the depth and breadth of the study's focus, were collected. Because the research was focused on an individual teacher in each school, the involvement of other school-based personnel was limited. However, during data collection the context of each classroom and, to some extent, of each school was discerned.

Interviews

A one-hour, semistructured, taped interview with each teacher occurred at the beginning and end of the data-collection period. An interview guide was used in the initial interview, during which time the participants were asked about their views on teaching and learning in general and language arts teaching specifically (see Appendix B). The final interview included questions about ideas that had emerged throughout the data-collection period specific to each teacher's

practice, as well as common questions regarding the teacher's views on teaching and learning. As well, during the course of the data collection there were numerous opportunities for ongoing conversations with each teacher, both spontaneous and as mutually arranged. During the interviews I listened carefully, letting the participants do the talking. I was conscious of listening on various levels: (a) for the substance of what the participant said; (b) for what the participant's inner voice might be saying, even though a public voice was being used; and (c) to the actual process of the interview (Seidman, 1991). I listened actively, questioned where I did not understand, asked to hear more about certain areas, and extended the conversation. To assist with this I kept notes of points raised and specific words used so that I was able to come back to those areas or prompt for further clarification during the interview. I tried to let the participant's voice be heard by avoiding reinforcing or leading comments or responses. Finally, I used the interview questions strictly as a guide and was able to follow my hunches in response to the participant's ideas. As Seidman said:

> The truly effective question flows from an interviewer's concentrated listening, engaged interest in what is being said, and purpose in moving forward. Sometimes an important question will start as an ill-defined instinct or hunch, which takes time to develop and seems risky to ask. Sometimes the effective question reflects the interviewer's own groping for coherence about what is being said and is asked in a hesitant, unsure manner. (p. 70)

The ability to follow my hunches and use intuition during the interviews allowed the interviewer-interviewee relationship to develop so that the interviews became more of a conversation. My intent during the initial interview was to establish a comfortable relationship and rapport with each participant that would allow for

ongoing conversation throughout the study. The final interview provided an opportunity to discuss and clarify each participant's teaching practices as observed during the study and to more fully explore the teacher's thoughts and my own emerging ideas about exemplary teaching.

Classroom Observations

Throughout the study, data collected through classroom observations provided material for ongoing conversations with each teacher about her practice. Classroom observations of each teacher were made on a regular schedule of an average of two half days each week, over a three-month period, during times when the teacher was involved in language arts activities. There was considerable flexibility to adjust the schedule as agreed by the participant and researcher. For example, there were times when a language arts lesson or activity extended over two or three consecutive days, at which time both the teacher and I agreed to additional classroom observations that week. There were also occasions when I was able to observe language arts activities that were integrated with other subject areas. Similarly, there were times when two observations during a particular week were not needed or possible. The research design was purposefully flexible, both to accommodate the participants' comfort and convenience and to allow for an unfolding of specific questions and answers to be pursued over the course of the study.

Field notes, referred to within the descriptions of practice in Chapter Four, were compiled both during and after each classroom observation. The notes included descriptions of the teachers' actions, verbatim comments, paraphrased

talk, interactions, teaching and learning activities and resources, descriptions of processes, and the context of the classroom. Although students were not the focus of data collection, their involvement in the activities of the classroom formed an important part of the context of the classroom and of the triadic relationship between teacher, student, and content matter. Data collection pertaining to the classroom context included observations and descriptions of the students' interactions with teachers and other students, the students' learning activities, the nature and products of the students' work, and the learning resources used by teachers and students. The involvement of parents and/or any other adult or child was limited to the extent that they were involved in the activities of the classroom and thus formed part of the classroom context of the teachers who were being studied.

Although the research was approached with a sense of openness, the research problem was kept clearly in mind. The initial interviews provided a sense of what is important to each teacher and assisted in providing direction and focus for classroom observations. As the research progressed, I was able to learn "what to pay attention to" so that my status as "observer as insider" enabled me to see the classroom and the teacher "as do the members of the class" (Boostrom, 1994, p. 61). As data were collected, there was ongoing analysis and interpretation of the data, which continued to inform the data-collection process.

All data were coded for reference. For example, the first teacher interview that I conducted with Anna on January 17, 2001, is referred to as T I A1 January 17, 2001. Similarly, field notes are referred to according to teacher and

date. For example, a classroom observation of Jean's teaching, conducted on March 21, 2001, is referred to as F N J11 March 21, 2001.

Data Analysis

Data analysis and interpretation were ongoing throughout the research period, with field notes and interview transcripts read many times on many occasions. Indeed, the process of data collection and analysis was concurrent and informed by my understanding of interpretive inquiry as an unfolding spiral (Ellis, 1998). Each attempt to get closer to an understanding of the research problem (with each unit of inquiry) is a loop in the spiral. What I learned within each loop provided direction and prompted reframing for the next loop in the spiral of the study. Even during the first teacher interview, as I asked questions and listened to the responses, new questions would form. As the research progressed, I began to have a sense of what might be important and to revisit ideas. In moving through the unfolding spiral, the depth and breadth of the data increased, my relationship with the participants became deeper, my ability to see as an insider developed, and each interpretation and finding enriched that which it preceded. Therefore, analysis was an ongoing, inductive, and heuristic process.

Data analysis was at two levels, descriptive and interpretive. Description was of the processes, relationships, setting and situations, systems (for example, the social organization of the classroom), and people who were apparent in the study (Peshkin, 1993). The accuracy, comprehensiveness, and sensitivity of the description formed a foundation for interpretation. Interpretation has been a

process of "meaning making" in which patterns have been discerned, the meanings and significances associated with behaviours have been revealed, and the relationship of the data to external considerations such as theories and philosophy were explored (McCutcheon, 1981). Interpretive analysis involved explaining, providing insights, clarifying, and understanding the complexity of the commonalities and differences apparent in the teachers' practices. A process of reading and rereading data and open coding the interview transcripts and field notes allowed me to examine, compare, and conceptualize common categories present in the data (Leedy, 1997).

Thus, the process of data analysis was ongoing throughout and at the conclusion of the data-collection period. After the first interview with each teacher, I analyzed each interview transcript, coding in the margins the words and phrases (such as class organization, skills, or collegial experiences) that seemed to capture the topic of what had been discussed. However, it was only after I began the classroom observations that the ideas discussed in the initial interviews seemed relevant. For example, when Anna had spoken in some detail about the strategies she uses to teach reading and writing, there were now observable practices. Similarly, Jean's descriptions of her classroom workstations, integral to her approach to teaching language arts, became vibrant and visible with each visit. Where Belle had shared her extensive background of team teaching experiences and ongoing professional development, there were observable examples of ways in which she tried to extend her students' thinking and foster collaborative group-work skills. With each successive observation, in

combination with the ongoing conversations with each teacher, a fuller picture of Anna's, Jean's, and Belle's teaching was being created. I jotted down words or phrases in my field notes beside the descriptions of practice, and I explored these emerging ideas and my questions with the teachers. Over time I both accumulated and analyzed data about what it was that seemed central to that teacher's exemplary teaching of language arts.

The final interview was an opportunity to probe deeper into the areas that seemed salient to each teacher's practice. During the final interview, not only did I ask questions common to all three teachers that would help me understand exemplary language arts teaching, but I also consciously explored with each teacher some of the categories that I saw emerging from the data. For example, among other questions, I asked Belle about "explaining," Jean about "teachable moments," and Anna about "foundations." During data analysis I also paid particular attention to the language used by the teachers; I listened for patterns of expression in the form of metaphors or images that, in turn, might illuminate the teachers' views of teaching and learning.

After the final interview, and with the last classroom observations, all of the data for each teacher were again read, and reread many times. Again I jotted down key phrases or words that seemed to categorize the practices that had been described or observed. When I had previously made notes, I reread and thought about whether each phrase continued to capture the idea or whether a new phrase might be better suited in light of what I had learned over time. At the same time I began to organize the data to write the descriptions of practice. For

each teacher I used two or three large sheets of paper to jot down the key words or phrases, with examples of practice, from the coded field notes or interviews. These charts were used to write the descriptions of practice contained in Chapter Four.

Even as I collected the data, coded it, and conceptualized each teacher's practice, I was consciously thinking about what could be learned from all three teachers about exemplary teaching in language arts. Data analysis then moved to a different level, wherein commonalities and differences were explored. I began to see the broad connections across the data that both encompassed what was unique for each teacher and captured the phenomenon of exemplary teaching in language arts. As I began to write the descriptions, it was apparent that although the coding of the data was different for each teacher, there were common themes inherent within the categories. For example, each teacher's interactions with her students were unique, but for all three teachers a profound sense of care for the learner and an attunement to the learner was captured thematically by "knowing the learner." Themes had emerged as "a form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand" or as a way of "describing the content of a notion" (van Manen, 1990, pp. 87-88).

Therefore, the following broad organizing themes emerged as significant aspects of the participants' exemplary teaching: (a) developing as a teacher, (b) knowing the learner, (c) creating a learning culture, (d) teaching for student learning, and (e) expressions of teaching and learning. Although a conceptual framework was not imposed on the data, it was apparent that the themes

encompassed the teachers' knowledge base for teaching, where pedagogical content knowledge encompasses all areas of knowledge and is the key to that knowledge base (Shulman, 1987). For example, in *developing as a teacher* each teacher expressed an approach to teaching and learning that appeared to derive from her background of teaching experiences, professional development opportunities, and work with colleagues. Further, that background of experience seemed to shape the way in which the teachers' knowledge of the learner, content, and general pedagogy was expressed through their teaching. In *knowing the learner* each teacher seemed to have extensive knowledge of the learner, as evidenced, for example, in the warm and supportive pedagogical relationship created between teacher and students. In *creating a learning culture* each teacher's knowledge of content and pedagogy was apparent in the way that the teacher structured the environment of her classroom to support learning. In *teaching for student learning* each teacher's extensive repertoire of language arts teaching strategies and curriculum expertise not only suggested knowledge of content and pedagogy, but was also strongly illustrative of the pedagogical content knowledge that encompasses all of the knowledge bases. Here too the complexity of teaching was apparent as each teacher seemed to transform, through instruction, something known and understood by the teacher into new understandings for the student (Shulman, 1987). Finally, in *expressions of teaching and learning* each teacher spoke about teaching and learning in ways that seemed to express (sometimes metaphorically) their philosophies, goals, and beliefs about what is important for their students. These expressions seemed

to provide another layer through which to understand the texture of the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge.

At the same time, the themes captured essential features of exemplary teaching in language arts (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 2001; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). For example, teacher practices evocative of *creating a learning culture* included excellent classroom management and the arranging of a literacy-rich classroom environment that was positive, reinforcing, and cooperative. Similarly, teaching strategies such as the explicit teaching of skills, the use of authentic literature, connecting concepts across the curriculum, ensuring high academic engagement, and scaffolding to match demands to student competencies are captured within *teaching for student learning.* The themes form the basis for the interpretations of practice and are discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

Trustworthiness

An interpretive inquiry of this type does not make claims of generalizability or objectivity. Rather, the trustworthiness of an interpretive study will depend upon whether the research has fully addressed the research problem or concern (Ellis, 1998). The following six considerations have been helpful in evaluating whether the research has accomplished its purposes (pp. 30-31):

1. Is it plausible, convincing?
2. Does it fit with other material we know?
3. Does it have the power to change practice?
4. Has the researcher's understanding been transformed?

5. Has a solution been uncovered?
6. Have new possibilities opened up for the researcher, research participants, and the structure of the context?

It is believed that the significance of the research problem, the study's conceptual framework, the review of literature and theoretical perspectives, and the researcher's background and experience were credible starting points for addressing the research problem. An explicit and thorough research methodology, supported by the collection of a substantial amount of data from multiple sources over a period of time and in different settings, has resulted in thick, authentic descriptions of practice. The presentation of accurate, detailed representations of teaching attest to the understandings generated in the study. As well, the trustworthiness of the study will be confirmed in its resonance for those who read it. I believe that the findings fit with what we already know as well as provide new insights into how teacher knowledge is expressed through exemplary teaching in language arts.

Assumptions

It was assumed in the study that there are teachers whose practice is distinguished as exemplary. Further, it was assumed that the knowledge of teachers informs their exemplary teaching of language arts.

Limitations and Delimitations

The study was limited to the extent that the participants were able to reflect upon and express their knowledge and practice. The study was also limited to the extent that I have been able to describe and interpret the knowledge and practice inherent within exemplary teaching of language arts.

The study was delimited through its focus on a defined group of three language arts teachers who teach in elementary schools in a large public school district.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted as approved by the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were informed that participation in the research was free and voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time from the research without penalty or prejudice. They were told of the nature of the participation requested of them in the research (as per arranging mutually agreeable times for interviews, observations and other date collection as mutually agreed upon). The research participants signed a Research Consent Form (Appendix A) that outlined the nature of their participation and responsibilities, the use of the research results, and the opportunity to opt out of the research at any time without penalty or prejudice. Participants were apprised on an ongong basis of their right to withdraw and would have been informed of any emergent factors or issues that might have caused them to reconsider their participation; none were apparent during the research. As agreed upon in the research consent form, the information gathered

has been treated confidentially and discussed only with research advisors. Information that identifies the participants will be destroyed upon completion of the research, and the partcipants will not be identifiable in documents resulting from the research. All data collection was conducted with the participants' consent, treated confidentially, and secured. Pseudonyms have been used for the teacher participants and all others at the school sites. The participants' anonymity has been protected.

It was anticipated that the research would be affirming and of benefit to the exemplary teachers who participated in the study; threats or harm to any of the participants were not apparent. All three teachers welcomed the classroom visits and indicated that they enjoyed the opportunity to discuss their practice. In all instances, I believe that I treated participants in a manner that was respectful of their rights and personal dignity and appreciative of their commitment to participate in the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter contains descriptions of exemplary teaching as seen in the practice of the teacher participants, Jean, Anna, and Belle. All three were elementary teachers within a large urban, public school. Jean taught a combined Grade 1 and 2 class, Anna taught Grade 4, and Belle had a Grade 6 class. Although the teachers were from the same school district, it will be seen in the descriptions of practice that each of their schools and the nature of the students within their classrooms were very different and that each teacher's practice was unique. The descriptions include information the teachers shared about their backgrounds, their students, the way in which they taught language arts, and some of their thoughts on teaching, as well as teaching practices that I observed during the data-collection period. Each of the three descriptions is organized in a similar fashion, with some variation to reflect areas that appeared most salient for each teacher. Belle's description includes an initial section on her description of how her teacher knowledge had developed, which reflects her diverse experiences. Although all three descriptions include information about teaching language arts, Anna's description specifically delineates areas within language arts that align with how Anna had structured her program. Each description contains contextual information about the teachers' students and concludes with the teachers' thoughts about teaching. The teachers' own words and ideas form an important part of the descriptions, for "the power of the voice of the teacher, a

voice that is often urgent, full of investment, hope and passion" (Ayers & Schubert, 1994, p. 114) can inform our understanding of exemplary teaching.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of a balanced literacy program, developed by the participants' school district to improve student achievement in language arts. District schools may choose to adopt the balanced literacy program, and it is typically implemented first in Division I (Grades 1 through 3), before being extended into Division II (Grades 4 through 6). Jean's school had adopted the program for Division I, Anna's school had extended the program into her grade level, and Belle's school had not yet adopted the program for Division II.

Balanced Literacy

The teacher support manual for the school district's balanced literacy program indicated that the program is philosophically based upon Vygotsky's work, whereby support is provided that will scaffold students to independence in learning (Brailsford, 2000). Organizing principles for the program refer to direct instruction that is multileveled to meet the needs of all students, and teacher modeling in which the teacher's thought processes are made explicit to students. Teachers receive coaching and support, they are encouraged to work within their school with other literacy teachers, and their ongoing input is valued. Practice activities may be supported by the home, but teachers have primary responsibility for the teaching of reading and writing. Students are to read at their instructional level, with regular times for reading and writing, and there is a daily routine for teaching spelling and word recognition skills. Cornerstones of the

balanced literacy program's approach to reading are (a) "Read Aloud" sessions during which the teacher models reading; (b) "Shared Reading," which invites students to read along, learning contextual decoding and comprehension strategies; (c) "Guided Reading," during which students are grouped at their instructional levels to read appropriately leveled books or novels with their teacher; and (d) "Independent Reading," with teacher-provided, leveled materials for the students to read on their own. Similarly, the balanced literacy approach to writing includes (a) "Write Aloud" sessions, during which the teacher models and talks about writing strategies while writing on a chart or overhead; (b) "Shared Writing," during which the teacher guides the students' contributions to writing about a shared topic (with attention to editing suggestions, spelling, and punctuation); and (c) "Guided" and "Independent Writing," during which prewriting support is provided through writing organizers, and the teacher guides and supports students individually or in small groups, as needed. The third cornerstone of the balanced literacy program, termed "Word Block," is a daily block of time used for direct instruction in spelling and word recognition (for example, word building, analysis, transfer and context, word patterns, sight words, and word recognition strategies). The Division I core program outlines the types of activities and the suggested time to teach each component of the program, and the Division II program is designed to build upon students' prior learnings and upon the approaches and strategies used in the Division I program. The Division II program is also designed to be more flexible in its approach than the Division I program; however, at both levels, teachers are

encouraged to integrate balanced literacy strategies within other curriculum areas (for example, writing activities might be achieved within science or social studies curriculum content areas).

Jean

"When you're ready, fold your arms and smile at me. See if you can catch my eye, and you might get a smile back." Jean's 26 students sat eagerly and attentively in their chairs, with eyes sparkling as they smiled at their teacher; and in that moment there was a sense of the warmth, interest, and purpose that underlay the fun and excitement of her Grade 1 and 2 classroom. Jean had always wanted to be a teacher, and as she looked into the faces of her students, it was clear that the past 26 years of teaching had brought her to a place and time where exemplary teaching and learning with her young students was a joy.

Jean had completed an education degree with a major in English and a minor in social studies, but she said that her best learning about teaching had been with colleagues and through professional development opportunities such as the teacher effectiveness and balanced literacy programs. Jean had always taught elementary school students, and she recalled special years of team teaching with collegial support that helped shape her learning-centred practice. For one memorable year she and another teacher team-taught 38 Grade 2s and 3s, "and it was so much fun to teach with another adult in the room." There were also three years of sharing an open area with two Grade 2 and 3 teachers, "which was another wonderful experience as far as teaching goes, and support, and colleagues." When Jean moved to Grade 1, she taught with a "wonderful

teacher" who mentored her and helped her to see how "everything built on each other" and "how the parts worked." She did not recall learning that while in university, and it was the first time that she really saw "how the reading fit together," and "it just made so much sense. It was so exciting." Jean continued to teach the younger children, and each year since "it's been better and I've loved it more and more" (T I J1 January 18, 2001).

Jean's school was built approximately 30 years ago in an area of modest bungalows, townhomes, and apartments. Over 300 students attended the school, many of whom came from outside of the area, attracted by the school's fine arts focus and extensive co-curricular programs. The circular building was originally designed as an open area school (which has since been reconfigured into classrooms), and its curved walls provide extensive display space for collections of artwork, stories, posters, and projects, completed by students with care and attention. Jean had taught in the school for 18 years, both in the original open area and now in a classroom on the perimeter of the school. She said that she "loves teaching" and that "it's the new things" such as the balanced literacy program, new ideas for math, and her classroom learning centres that keep teaching fun and interesting. On the wall outside of her classroom were colourful cut-out figures of her students, smiling, with linked hands, which suggested the enthusiastic and cooperative nature of the children within the class. This was Jean's second year teaching a combined Grade 1 and 2 class, and she had 13 students in each grade, although any kind of grade demarcation was not readily apparent in the way the room was arranged.

Jean's Students

What I found readily apparent during the period of classroom observations was the feeling of care that Jean had for her students and the kindness with which she treated them. Jean thought that "treating kids with kindness" underlay her teaching, and her expectation from the first day of school was that children would listen respectfully to each other, and she would do the same for them. Students' responses and actions were met with a sincere "Thank you!" and smiles and eye contact appeared to convey to the children how special their teacher though that they were. I consistently observed a sparkle to Jean, seen in a ready smile, an upbeat and positive attitude, and her apparent enjoyment of fun and interesting classroom activities. Jean thought that children learn best when they feel good about themselves and when they are happy and relaxed, so that was what she tried to achieve in her classroom. She wanted to make her classroom a happy place for working and playing and to make learning fun. "And I really like the kids, and once they really believe that, they'll just do anything."

Developing her students' self-esteem was important: "So what's really important to me is self-esteem and positives, positives in behaviour, positives in learning" (T I J1 January 18, 2001). Jean did not push children, but "prefer[red] to bring them along at their own speed." For students who were struggling, the focus was on what they were doing well so that they would have the confidence to keep trying and say, "I can do this." She thought that "everybody's good at some things and not so good at others, and we find their strengths." Jean would "go the extra mile" for her students, and "I expect it back from them. And it just

sort of sets the tone." The students' positive actions were recognized in many ways. Students were seated in groups, and as each group sat quietly, ready to listen and ready to work, Jean acknowledged their effort by putting a tick by their group's number on the blackboard. As she did this, she provided cues for the other students to follow: "Allen, I really like the way you're doing this," or "Thank you, group six!" (F N J1 March 21, 2001). With her encouragement, all groups typically received ticks. Earlier in the year, a jellybean or sticker might have acknowledged the students' quiet work, focus, or cooperative problem solving or when students "were able to say, this is the problem that we had; this is how we solved it." Now the treat is provided intermittently, "and they never quite know." Consistently observed, however, throughout the time I spent in Jean's classroom was her knowing nod, wink, sincere "Thank you!" or a pat on the shoulder to show students that their positive efforts were appreciated.

Jean thought that her students were "wonderful leaders," and she provided ongoing daily opportunities for students to lead the class and to make important decisions. For example, as part of the morning routine, a student led the class through the reading of the morning message, pointing to each word to be read by classmates. Another student ran the opening calendar exercises, deciding upon the words that would be used to describe yesterday, today, and tomorrow, and appeared to model for the other students the respectful manner that Jean modeled for them as she taught. Jean said that the "children feel like they have the authority to say, 'I'm sorry. You're not listening to me. It's my turn to speak. Would you please go back to your desk?'" (T I J2 March 7, 2001).

Extending the leadership further, two students were in charge of returning a large bin of books to the library, and two others were responsible for setting up the supplies for the "making words" activity that would occur later in the morning. When Jean asked questions during the morning message or during spelling word practice, the student who answered the question then chose the student who would answer the next question. The student leader in the line-up decided whether the class was ready to walk or needed to stop, and at the end of the day a student inspected the work of classmates to tidy up their classroom. Jean had taught half of her students when they were in Grade 1, so they knew how to work in the classroom, and "the first month of Grade 1 is really getting them through routines. They were sponges, and they just soaked it in." I saw the extent to which leadership was shared with six- and seven-year-olds as an indication of the respect and trust that Jean had for her students and evidence of the work she had done to enable her students to become increasingly independent and confident.

Jean said that her students were "kind, and they're supportive of each other. They are excited about learning, and they ask lots of questions and they have lots of enthusiasm. Sometimes it's hard to contain it all, but they're just so keen to try anything," which seemed to echo Jean's own excitement and interest. Two of Jean's Grade 1 students were below grade level in reading, and "one of them has come along very well; the other is a little slower to advance." All of the Grade 2 students were at grade level, "and they're just sailing, they really are. It's quite exciting to see, especially having had some of them for two years. To see

the growth, it's just wonderful." Jean's desire to have her students love reading, to believe that they could read, and to think reading and writing are exciting seemed to permeate her teaching.

Teaching Language Arts

Jean had arranged her classroom with a comfortable mix of large- and small-group meeting areas and work stations, and a wealth of displays and resources to foster language development. Individual student tables and chairs were arranged in clusters of four and five in the middle of the large, almost square room, from where the front wall blackboard can be easily seen (F N J1 January 18, 2001). Jean frequently changed the seating arrangements to make it more interesting for students. She said that she liked to "mix them up so they're working with different kids," and she liked them to "be in different parts of the room "to give each child the best chance," because she thought that she might "teach to a certain part of the room." In addition, "it makes it a little more interesting" (T I J1 January 18, 2001). In the corner by the window, and tucked around her desk, was a workstation filled with a large variety of games (mostly teacher made) to develop reading and writing skills. The opposite corner held another workstation with puzzles, books, and games that changed with the topics and themes being studied (for example, materials about magnets or senses addressed science curriculum objectives). The large area in the back corner had open floor space (where the class met each morning), which was used for class reading, writing, and sharing activities. The area was also a reading workstation; it contained bins of leveled reading books and three computers with a variety of

software to develop literacy skills. A table used for guided reading and games was in the other back corner, and further tucked away was the listening work station with kits of storybooks and tapes. Along the back counter were bins of leveled books for the home reading program and countertops filled with games for centre time. Another countertop was filled with packets of books for guided reading and a display of books related to the class author or book study. There were two word walls with word cards arranged alphabetically, and wall displays of words, poems, numbers, maps, and pictures to stimulate and support language arts and other curriculum areas. Alphabet charts were taped onto student tabletops and posted at the front of the room, and there were two pocket charts, a bulletin board display of reading strategies, a flip chart filled with charts that the class had made, and shelves of books and old readers. I saw the room as bright and stimulating, and typical of classroom environments that support literacy learning (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000).

The classroom arrangement accommodated whole-class instruction, with individual and group work at workstations and learning centres. Jean said that she loves to teach with learning centres, because it is "just like magic, being able to teach that way" (T I J2 March 7, 2001). She thought that students learn better when they are having fun and said that centres or workstations address the students' different learning modalities. Over the years Jean had made or gathered a large collection of learning resources and games; the work stations were changed each month to reflect class topics and the students' developing

abilities. Jean distinguished between how work stations and centres are used in her classroom. Work stations are centres with literacy-based materials on which groups of students worked during a block of time each morning while Jean read with one of her four guided reading groups. There was also a short period of centre time at the end of each day when students were free to work with a partner and use the work stations as well as a variety of games and play activities (such as modeling clay and building blocks). The centre time was also a "catch-up" time where Jean could work with individuals who needed help, schoolwork could be completed, and problems that might have emerged during the day or at recess could be discussed and resolved. With this time at the end of the day, Jean found that she was able to maintain a focus on learning throughout the day and better support individual needs.

Exemplary literacy instruction uses an instructionally balanced approach, varying whole-class, small-group, and individual work, with integrated explicit skill instruction and opportunities to read and write whole, authentic texts (Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997). In Alberta the language arts curriculum supports a balanced and meaning-centred approach to language arts in which the general outcomes are interrelated and interdependent (Alberta Learning, 1999). To meet curriculum requirements and student needs, the school had adopted a balanced literacy program, and Jean was in her second year of the program. Jean readily incorporated new ideas from the balanced literacy program within her teaching. She said that it was so similar to how she had previously taught reading and writing in Grade 1; it "fits together," yet, it "goes

beyond," which is "more interesting, more exciting" (T I J1 January 18, 2001). Jean said that she included all of the program's suggested components for reading, writing, and skill development; she appreciated the support of the balanced literacy consultant, who encouraged her to adjust the suggested times and activities to make the program fit to reflect her needs and the needs of her students. As well, she really liked the balanced literacy meetings because they gave her more ideas, such as different ways to stretch the comprehension, even beyond the guidebook, and "it's quite exciting, because I actually feel like I keep firing off these ideas." Jean liked ideas to relate to each other, and when she planned, she liked to see the "whole picture, where we're going with it, and how it will fit together, the timeframe with work, and how the kids will fit into it." She believed that there should be a link between everything they did and said that it was exciting when the students picked up the link and talked about how it fit with something else that they had learned in school.

The school day began as Jean led her students into the classroom from the playground, chatted with a parent, and dispensed hugs, smiles, and happy greetings: "Welcome back Eli. Nice to see you feeling better" (F N J2 January 25, 2001). The 26 students (15 of whom were girls) hung up their coats and knapsacks and found their way to their desks with their home-reading books safely tucked into plastic envelopes. Jean quietly counted back from five with her fingers, smiled, caught students' eyes, and thanked students as they sat down in their desks, ready for the morning announcements. With the news that the Division I drama club was meeting after school, Jean nodded knowingly at

Jeffrey, sharing in his excitement. Following the announcement, the students knew exactly what to do, and there was a sense of purpose as, group by group, Jean called the students to her desk, where she checked their home-reading logs. Then the students exchanged their books for another at the appropriate level from the labeled book bins at the back of the room. The buzz of quiet chatter was heard as some of the children checked to see which books their classmates had chosen. Other children read, worked with plasticine, finished math work, worked on the computer, wrote in their journals, or tried to figure out the morning message written on the blackboard at the front of the room. "Last call for all groups" was the signal for students to put their work away, and "while you're cleaning up, have a peek for extra pencils and scissors in your container. That would be helpful for everyone." Most of the children were ready right away, and with a gentle reminder—"If you're not sure what I'm looking for, look at group five"—the entire class was ready for the rest of the morning routines.

Each morning, Jean wrote a morning message on the blackboard, with missing letters in the words. The teaching of skills is an important part of exemplary literacy instruction, whether done explicitly or opportunistically throughout the day (Morrow et al., 1999). It appeared to me that the morning message was used to work on skills such as sight words, phonics, word structure, reading strategies, and word families. With smiles, nods, and thank yous, students filled in the missing letters and were helped to see the "jail words" (that do not follow rules of sounds), look for root words, and think about what might have made sense in the sentence (F N J2 January 25, 2001). It seemed

that Jean's questions challenged the Grade 1 and 2 students at their appropriate level (short sight words and beginning sounds for Grade 1s), and guesses were welcomed as an opportunity to learn. "What kind of a 'g'?" Jean asked, as the class decoded "Good morning," and "Can you tell me another word that starts this way?" With one difficult word left, Jean suggested that the class reread the sentence to see what word made sense, and soon "which" was decoded and the morning message was read individually and in unison. On another day (F N J9 February 27, 2001) words with the "ch" sound were shared; then the students who had Cheerios for breakfast were invited to the reading corner; the students were quick to see the connection. Another day stands out too (F N J6, February 8, 2001) as a little girl raised her hand and said that she had figured out the previous day's morning message all by herself and had written it down in her scribbler. Jean knew that this was important: "That was the first time you'd done the morning message, wasn't it?" The student beamed as her teacher said, "Good for you. Bring it to me for a sticker, " and a small milestone of independence in reading and writing was celebrated.

Most primary classrooms complete the calendar and check the weather each day. Jean seemed to elevate this daily routine to an integrated mini-unit of study that incorporated math, science, and social studies objectives within a language-based learning experience. On one day Trent was the leader, and he and his group were the first to be seated in the calendar corner. "Please set a good example for the others, " Jean said, then whispered, "Flat seats, good posture" (F N J2 January 25, 2001). Trent called the rest of the groups and, when

everyone was settled, placed the date number card on the calendar; it could be seen that the calendar numbers had been made from different coloured papers that would form a pattern for the children to discern as the month unfolded. Jean asked the date of the last Wednesday, the next Tuesday, and how many Sundays were in the month before Trent moved on to the sentence patterns. "Yesterday was extraordinary, today is interesting, and tomorrow will be magnificent," the students read. "Did anyone think of interesting words to surprise me?" Jean asked, and to keep a purposeful pace, three suggestions were given from which Trent could choose a word to describe how today would be. "Today will be awesome" was written on a small whiteboard, complete with the date and day. The words were also added to a chart as a record of interesting descriptive words. Trent then added a popsicle stick to the bundles, which had been used since the beginning of the school year to count out the days of school. Jean said, "It's a moving day," because moving from 89 to 90 required bundling and regrouping by 10. "Can we count this by fives?" as the class used the counting charts to count by 1s, 5s, and 10s. Money cutouts were next used to show 89 cents, and with one more penny, 10 pennies were traded for a dime to make 90 cents in all. "Oh, we're getting richer, richer!" noted Jean. There was a thermometer for each school day that, after suggestions from the class, Trent adjusted to show the predicted high temperature, and comparisons were made between yesterday and last week. Jean asked students to "Look out the window, and tell me what you think about the sky," so that the weather graph could be completed for sun, rain, snow, wind, or clouds. Some days the happy birthday

graph and tooth chart were used, but today, with all of the duties complete, the students returned to their desks. "If you like birthdays, you may tiptoe back to your desk." I saw the discussions as rich in vocabulary, with the students being shown that symbols and words have meanings that relate to their world.

Skill development continued when the class was involved in spelling or "making words" activities. Jean said that her spelling program was based upon the balanced literacy program, and each week five new words were taught to each grade and added to the word walls. Both grades were taught together as a class, and during the spelling lesson, Grade 1 students challenged the Grade 2 words, and Grade 2 students reviewed the Grade 1 words. Jean had prepared the word cards in advance, and she introduced each one by holding it up so that students could "look at the word, listen to the word, say it in a sentence" (F N J3 January 29, 2001). Keeping a brisk pace, the Grade 1 students looked at *will*. "Let's clap the word: w-i-l-l," then "Snap the word, print it on the ceiling." Alternating with the Grade 2 words, each grade took its turn clapping and snapping their word: "Just the boys clap, just the girls clap, print it on your hand, print it on the seat of your chair." As the words were tapped and printed, they were added to the pocket charts. It appeared that Jean wanted to help her students think about their learning; when they got to the word *before*, Jean reminded them to "watch for that bossy 'e,'" and she asked how they would remember to spell *again* ("put a big jailbox around this one"). Then Jean asked the students to place the words in alphabetical order and cued the Grade 1 students to sing the alphabet as they searched for the letters. Several students

came to the front to arrange the words alphabetically; then the other students indicated with thumbs up or down whether they agreed or disagreed with the arrangement. With all the words displayed and alphabetized in the pocket chart, Jean set the timer to allow time for students to print their words in their coil-bound dictionaries and to practice printing the words on a partner's back. When the timer buzzed, the students knew that it was time to put their work away.

Spelling words were practiced in different ways throughout the week prior to the weekly spelling test. One day each student took a small chalkboard and cloth, then asked a partner to spell the week's words, as well as any others on the word walls. The catch was that the student had to know first how to spell the word before asking the partner (F N J9 February 27, 2001). Another day the students prepared a spelling bingo card by folding a paper into 16 spaces and printing their spelling words in the spaces (F N J7 February 14, 2001). Jean said each word, alternating Grade 1 and 2 words; each grade spelled its own words twice and the other grade's words once. As the students printed, Jean moved around the classroom, checking work and lightly touching students on the back or nodding approval. Students who needed a little more time to print knew that they could put up their hand and that Jean would pause a moment before saying the next word. A student was chosen to spell each word orally, and the other students listened, then gave a silent cheer if their word was spelled correctly. When the cards were completed, a spelling bingo game provided further practice as students crossed the words off as they were said, changed crayon colours for each three-in-a-row, and continued until the entire card was crossed off. Every

child won because all students had at least one row of three-in-a-row, and it appeared that the children had fun learning their words.

It seemed that "making words" activities were fun too. Two student helpers had set up the supplies for their classmates to pick up from the back table, and within minutes every child in the class had seven letter cards and a tray to hold them on their desks (F N J5 February 6, 2001). Jean did a quick check to ensure that each student had the correct supplies; then the word building began. "Let's start with a really nice, easy two-letter word—*an*"; then longer three, four, and five letter words followed. The words to be made were phrased as riddles ("A four letter word, how I like to see your desks. Yes, *neat*!"), and there was a great deal of discussion about word families, the sounds of the consonants, and the rules for vowels (*Stem* has that 'taste bad' sound. You don't want that on your tongue!"). As the students built words, Jean walked around the classroom, checking on the students' words and placing the word cards in the pocket chart for students to see. The challenge word used all of the letters, and the students helped each other to spell *magnets*, which was the topic of one of their workstations. As the lesson finished the students carefully returned their supplies, group by group, to the back table, and Jean said, "When you're ready and lined up at the door for recess, I'm going to ask you a magnet question." As the students met at the door, the questions began: "What do we call the ends of the magnets? What happens when we put south and south together? Now, can you make a question?" The bell rang for recess and the students left the

classroom, chatting about magnets, which I saw as a teachable moment that reinforced and extended the students' learning.

The use of teachable moments is a distinguishing feature of exemplary literacy teaching where teachers use opportunities throughout the day to reinforce and review literacy learnings and to develop skills (Morrow et al., 1999). Jean said that her sense of those teachable moments "just sort of comes" and that she had "developed it a lot over the years" (T I J2 March 7, 2001). Jean appeared keenly attuned to her students; during the course of the classroom observations, her alert attention to her students' facial expressions and body language was consistently seen. She watched, listened carefully, and paid attention to where the students' eyes were looking. Jean thought that she knew her students well, so "when Lynn puts up her hand and she's got a little spark in her eye, she always gets asked. So it's really nice to see; she's just starting to percolate, just a little bit." Another time, during the morning message, Jean saw David's eyes looking at the pocket chart, and she knew that he had spotted one of the spelling words in the morning message: "Good for you! And it's one of the Grade 2 words!" (F N J5 February 6, 2001). It seemed that every moment of the day provided an opportunity in which the learning could be extended or, in Jean's words, "bumped up." For example, as students opened their Valentine's cards, they were reminded to use their reading strategies to read all the words; then they were asked to sort their Valentines in some way and to explain how they were sorted (F N J7 February 14, 2001). While some of the students were finishing their work, several other students joined Jean at the blackboard and

helped her make words out of the letters of "Happy Valentine's Day." As she wrote the words on the board, Jean challenged the students to figure out how she was sorting the words; the students saw that she was writing them in word families. In the line-up for recess, students were dismissed as they spelled a spelling word. Or, when three students were invited to read their journals to the class, the order of the reading was determined by the alphabetical order of the students' names (F N J9 February 27, 2001). Jean had taught the class many games, and she said that when she saw "a lot of big sighs" or signs that the children needed a change, a student was asked to choose a game from the list. "Stump the Star" is fun, but it is also a learning game that challenges the students to ask questions about what they have learned and to have the answers clearly in mind to see whether they could stump their classmates (F N J2 January 25, 2001).

Jean helped her students develop their reading strategies throughout the day, and daily in guided reading groups. She explained that there were four reading groups in her classroom, and each day she read with a different group. During this time the rest of the students were involved in literacy-based activities in the various workstations (F N J5 February 6, 2001). Two students were listening and following a story on tape, while in the workstation at Jean's desk students were building words with magnetic letters and playing word games, such as Fish for Words, and Spill and Spell. The three computers were occupied, and partners took turns moving the mouse to use the literacy-based software while, in the same corner, students read books from the leveled book bins.

Interesting books and puzzles about dinosaurs captured the attention of four of the students who were busily piecing the puzzles together. A chart holder, with individual stories about each student in the class (written during "class writes" in September to model writing skills), had been pulled into the middle of the room. Children love to play school, even in school, so perched on a stool was the "student," while the "teacher" led the reading, using a pointer to track the words. During the first month of school Jean had taught her students how to work in stations, and she said that they now were independent workers who knew the "three before me" rule to ask classmates for help; seldom was Jean interrupted to answer a question or to deal with misbehaviour. When Jeffrey spoke loudly and was off-task at a centre, Jean caught his eye and had him sit beside her to calm him down before he went back to work. At the end of workstation time, Jean noted how well Jeffrey refocused on his work and invited the students to tell her about any difficulties that they encountered and how they solved them (F N J3 January 29, 2001). As is typical in exemplary teaching, I saw that in Jean's room classroom management was in place that enabled students to become independent and self-regulated, and discipline was handled in a quiet and low-key manner, with the student redirected to learning activities (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000).

In constructivist teaching, teachers activate students' prior knowledge, employ reflective dialogue, contextualize strategies within meaningful content, and promote students' active construction of knowledge (Glatthorn, 1997). In

exemplary literacy teaching, teachers pay attention to the thought processes of students; this was evident in the teacher's questions that asked students about how they accomplished tasks, how literary decisions were made, the reading cues used, and to explain conclusions and comprehension decisions (Wray et al., 2000). Such questions provide scaffolds or supports for the students' higher-level thinking, and I saw Jean's attention to her students' thought processes in evidence as she worked with the guided reading groups (F N J5 February 6, 2001). Six students clustered around the large round table, with partners happily sharing a book as the reading was introduced; the theme was kindness, and the book was about friends. Jean's questions guided the prereading discussion as the students talked about how they knew when someone was their friend, what they liked to do with friends, and the unusual friends whom they knew from real life or fiction. Jean related their ideas to a fable about a lion and a mouse which they had previously read, then focused on unusual friends, which was the topic of the book they were about to begin. She wondered who they thought the book would be about, and the students searched for clues on the front and back covers. The discussion piqued the students' interest, and they were eager to start reading as Jean said, "Good readers always read with a purpose." As they read, students were to think about whether the characters became friends, and why they thought so. As well, during guided reading, students were asked to use a "sticky note" to mark any interesting words that they figured out and their strategy for figuring out the words. As observed during each guided reading period, Jean read with two students, while she

listened for fluency and made a note of miscues, reading strategies, and difficult vocabulary. The students responded to positive comments and questions: "Good expression. How did you know to read it that way?" and "Why do you think that?" When all of the students finished reading, the group convened to "re-tell, relate, and reflect." It seemed that comprehension of the story was reinforced as students answered the prereading questions that had been posed; then new questions were asked about what the story reminded them of and how they felt about the story. After the meaning of the story was established, the students shared the interesting words they had found and their strategies for figuring them out. Words were decoded from the context, from letter sounds, and by breaking into parts. One day, when students encountered unfamiliar names in their story, Jean taught them a new strategy (F N J6 February 8, 2001). When students came to a name that they did not know, they could look at the picture to decide whether to use a boy's or a girl's name and continue to use the made-up name each time the unfamiliar name was encountered. It seemed that Jean kept the focus on reading for meaning, using decoding strategies as a tool to aid comprehension.

Wray et al. (2000) found that in exemplary literacy teaching, a range of literacy skills and knowledge is developed through the context of shared texts. Class "read alouds" provided opportunities for the entire class to enjoy a book with their teacher and for Jean to teach important reading strategies to the students. Books were selected that related to a theme or author study and provided a stimulus for shared and independent writing activities, such as

sequencing, comparison, postcards or letters, persuasive writing to convince a classmate to read the book, or; "whatever is suggested by the book." One day (F N J4 February 1, 2001), Jean talked with her students about ways to think about and organize stories and reviewed the chart of "5 W's" (who, what, when, where, why) and "H-I" (how, if) that the class had previously completed. The topic of the book study unit was the *Arthur* book series, and today Jean asked students to think about the chart as she read *Arthur's Birthday* to them so that they could ask these types of questions after the story was read. She noted that "if" questions would be difficult, so they "might like to be thinking about it as we read," and "good readers think about questions, even when they're being read a story." Jean read the story, modeling expression and pausing from time to time to ask students about what had been read and to predict what they thought might happen next. When Arthur received dollar bills, a moment was taken to clarify loonies and dollars and to note that the book was written in the United States. At the end of the story Jean asked students to think about the story organizer chart and to share their questions for each of the "5Ws" and "HI." The students asked their questions, then chose classmates to answer their questions in complete sentences. As predicted, the "HI" questions were more difficult; Jean accepted a "how come" question, then asks students for a question that was only "how." The "if" questions were asked successfully, which suggested to me that the students were developing their abilities to comprehend, predict, see consequences, and think creatively.

Exemplary literacy teaching connects writing experiences to reading growth (Morrow et al., 1999). Jean liked to use an integrated teaching approach in which she linked ideas from stories to develop writing skills. "So what I like to do, I've found it works for me, is to pick a theme, and I like to do author studies. And for each book, we do a different kind of writing activity" (T I J1 January 18, 2001). As a follow-up to the story about Arthur's birthday and to introduce a writing lesson, she told the class about her own best birthday, when her father took pictures with the movie camera and there were balloons and games (F N J3 January 29, 2001). There was a subtle lesson on manners embedded in the story of how her mother wrapped coins in paper to hide in the angel food cake. "And I'd been taught to take the piece closest to me, so my mother watched to see if I would remember my manners, and I did; I took the piece closest to me even though it wasn't the biggest." There was a momentary pause, as Jean scanned the faces of her students; then she moved on. Jean charted the ideas from her own birthday under the "5Ws' and "HI" and showed the students a one-page story organizer that mirrored the larger one they had just seen. The modeled and guided practice in using a story organizer continued as the class worked together to suggest ideas about one of the student's birthday. When the students appeared confident in the idea-organizing process, Jean handed each child an organizer page, saying, "First things first." "Name at the top," responded the students as they returned to their desks to busily print their ideas. I saw the use of such mini-lessons in different skill areas, such as story organizers, as typical of exemplary literacy teaching (Morrow et al., 1999).

During "write aloud" lessons, the writing process was modeled for students. The "5Ws" story organizer from the birthday lesson was used as Jean wrote a story about her birthday (F N J4 February 1, 2001). The students saw the ideas from the organizer written in sentences, and as they read the story together, Jean pointed out the capital letters and periods and how the ideas could be written in any order that made sense. Previously, the students had completed their own idea sheet and were now ready to begin the process of writing their own birthday story. "I'll help you with the editing, but that's the next step." A picture could be added after "you bring it to me and we read it together." As the students worked, Jean went from desk to desk, paying special attention to some of the Grade 1 students who were just emerging as writers. To help with their words, students referred to the word walls and to their own little dictionaries in which words could be printed as needed. The students' progress as writers was affirmed: "While I walked around I noticed many of you rereading and checking your work. I saw Alison changing her words and adding periods. That's called editing, and it's what good writers do."

On another day (F N J5 February 6, 2001), Jean helped the class write a letter to the school principal, inviting her to see their "one hundredth day of school" collections. In turn, students went up to the chart board and wrote their sentences as Jean guided the process. Printing skills, sentence composition, punctuation, and word skills were attended to as I saw Jean providing just enough help, cueing students' thoughts, and praising: "My goodness, at the beginning of school I did most of the spelling." The students also wrote daily in

their student agendas and their journals. For example, prewriting brainstorming about the "one hundredth day of school" generated lots of ideas about which students could write, or they could choose another topic of interest if they liked (F N J6 February 8, 2001). Jean set the timer for uninterrupted writing time and circulated through the class with stickers for the journals. When the timer sounded, students knew that they had five more minutes to finish up their writing or draw a picture to go with it; then they eagerly volunteered to read to the class.

Jean thought that her students were "just settling in, and they're really, really strengthening." She felt that she was successful in teaching language arts when she saw growth, "and it doesn't have to be a whole year's growth for me to be delighted" (TI J1 January 18, 2001). Effort and small steps forward meant success to Jean. For example, one of her "little ones" in first grade came to her with his spelling list, and he wanted to try his spelling words again. "And he tried so hard on his printing, and he's listening to the sounds, and those are the kind of things that show me it's working." Collinson (1996) found that exemplary teaching stresses conceptual understanding where students are able to explain the how and why of a process and apply their learning. Jean said that she wanted her students to think about learning and to learn how to learn; she thought that her students were successful if they could say what skills they were using to solve problems or what strategies they used to figure out words when they read. At each report period Jean did an in-depth reading assessment in which each student read a passage that was just slightly harder than the student's instructional level. When she told the students that she was looking for reading

strategies, "they just took off." Jean said that she started the year by teaching strategies to her students at a basic level of picture clues first, and then she added beginning sounds and continued to build. A bulletin board display reminded students of the many reading strategies that they could use in their reading, and it was exciting for Jean to see her students using the strategies, "all these building blocks that they're using to build." Now students verbalized their strategies, such as "It didn't make sense, so I reread it." Jean wanted students to develop their metacognition skills, so "we're doing a lot of 'retell-relate-reflect'" as part of the reading process, and the students would say that a story reminded them of another book or learning activity or caused them to wonder about something else they had heard or seen. Jean also asked students where her idea for the morning message might have come from, and throughout the day students thought about their reading strategies and what they had learned by playing a certain game. At the end of the day she asked students to "think back to one thing you learned today."

The language arts strands of listening, speaking, viewing, representing, reading, and writing are interrelated and interdependent within the curriculum, and facility in one area strengthens another (Alberta Learning, 1999). I saw that Jean's teaching involved her students in activities throughout the day that promoted language learning, whether within language arts activities or embedded within other subject areas. For example, science concepts (about seasons, senses, and nature) were introduced and explored through choral poetry (such work was compiled in students' scribblers, where each student had

copies of the seasonal and thematic poems, stories, and songs that had been learned during the year). During gym time listening skills were stressed as students responded to directions to guide their movements (F N J8 February 20, 2001). A social studies lesson accentuated viewing, reading, listening, and writing skills to develop concepts about communities. The students listened as Jean read them a short book about a family in Vancouver and then printed information about houses, schools, recreation, and occupations and compared the way the family lived to a family in Edmonton (F N J9 February 27, 2001). Games and software programs required students to read and predict as mathematical concepts were reinforced (F N J8 February 20, 2001).

Jean also provided opportunities for parents to help students at home with their reading through a daily home-reading program. To ensure that students were reading at the appropriate level of challenge and success, Jean kept a checklist of each student's reading level for home reading which corresponded to the instructional level for guided reading. Student agendas were used each day for parents to record the names of the books as they were read, and each morning Jean checked the reading log before students selected their next book. Jean said, "I have high expectations, and I know that they will do the home reading. And if they don't, and it's not their fault, then I provide a buddy system for them, and I make sure they get the reading done each day." Jean also coordinated the work of parents who volunteered to help her from time to time, and she particularly valued the professional approach of Mrs. Morris, who spent two days a week reading with students and helping the students with specific

skills or concepts. "One-on-one, every week, Mrs. Morris works with each child with their reading or their making words or some writing, so that's just the cement." Thus, the flow of teaching and learning in Jean's classroom, observed over several months, appeared cohesive and seamless as Jean's young students developed and strengthened their language arts abilities, had fun learning together, and kept a sparkle in their teacher's eyes. As Jean thought about her students' learning, she was pleased that all of the students had "shown wonderful growth," with almost all reading at or beyond their grade level. She was excited about her plans for the rest of the year, where she would continue to build on the students' accomplishments with a new author study, more writing activities, and more new games and ideas for the work stations.

Thinking About Teaching

Jean loved new ideas and was always looking for ways to meet her students' needs (T I J2 March 7, 2001). She said that different children learn in different ways: Visual learners need to see it, tactile learners to move things or print on someone's back or in sand, and auditory learners to hear it. She tried to find the way that each child learned best, then provided the appropriate learning experiences. As well, Jean thought that the more information that she had about the child, such as what was happening at home, the easier it was to find some way to reach that child. She emphasized that it is important to know the subject matter, as you "have to know where you've been, where you're going, and how it fits together"; but you have to know the students and be able to change your approach to the subject based upon how the students are reacting. Jean trusted

her instincts, and "if it [did not] feel right" when she was teaching, then she would try another approach. She might "move things around or put in a game. Or ask the kids to pick a game, but it has to be something we're learning: Tell me what we're learning in the game, and why we are playing the game."

Collinson (1996) found that exemplary teaching can occur "between-the-lines," where the ethics and dispositions that teachers hold as important for a happy and productive life are modeled or "taught" and where intrapersonal knowledge includes a capacity for reflection. Jean said that she nurtured her personal awareness and sensitivity by doing many things outside of school that did not seem school related but informed her teaching and "[made] her the kind of person she is" (T I J2 March 7, 2001). She was involved in various groups that gave her a greater awareness of ways to deal with the world and with people, to get to know herself better, and to learn about things that made her a fuller person. Psychology and the relationship of mind and body were areas of interest. Because of her own nurturing and reflection, Jean thought that she was able to stay calm and focused and really connect with the children, even when "things get a little bubbly." As Jean reflected on her teaching experience, she commented that teaching is "less black and white; there are more greys now," because she saw the whole child more than she ever did before, and she was "willing to try more things now." As well,

> home situations really impact kids, so I have patience with the little ones whose parents are really having a tough time. I cut them more slack then I normally would. So probably, I treat children more gently than I did when I first started and had all the answers.

Jean wanted her students to know that "they're likable kids, that I like them, that I believe in them, that I believe they can go places." She hoped that they would "learn a lot this year: and "come out as whole people who see themselves as learners."

Anna

The landmarks were easy to spot. On one corner stood a large liquor store and on the other, an adult superstore advertising videos and massages. Along the avenue that led to the school were small wood-frame and stucco houses in varying states of repair and disrepair, interspersed with storefronts that seemed to recall days when business was better and customers were more affluent and plentiful. A small neighbourhood park, a clapboard community hall, and a church were passed before bright orange pylons and the vests of school patrols signalled that the school had been reached. The school's solid brick structure suggested permanence and strength in a community worn by time, and when I entered through freshly painted doors, the light, warmth, and comfort of the newly modernized school dispelled a lingering sense of bleakness.

Anna was a Grade 4 teacher in this school, and her classroom was on the second floor. In her previous years at the school Anna had taught a combined Grade 3 and 4, a combined Grade 2 and 3, and a part-time Grade 5 class (with a music assignment at another school). In describing her background (T I A1 January 17, 2001), Anna said that she "came to teaching late" because she had taught piano, run her own music school, and raised a family before beginning her teaching career. After completing a four-year honors music program in Ontario,

she had taught music, language arts, and other subjects to Grades 3, 4, and 5 and had had a Grade 2 homeroom class for two years. When the family moved to Alberta, she took an additional year of university to complete her education degree, and after less than a year of substitute teaching, she obtained a job at her current school. This year Anna was responsible for teaching language arts, math, music, and some physical education to her homeroom students; and she also taught music to other classes in the school and ran the school choir, which practiced twice a week. Haberman (1995) suggested that "star" teachers for at-risk students need physical and emotional stamina; Anna's energetic classroom movements (she seldom sat down and could be observed constantly moving around the classroom) suggest the stamina that had developed from her six-day-a-week running program and personal fitness routine. To ensure that her voice was not overstrained, she used a voice amplification system in the classroom. The school's principal said that Anna was a "fabulous teacher," but Anna's response was typically modest and unassuming. Anna said that there were many wonderful teachers in the school, and she was not so sure that she could be singled out; there were often times that she felt that she "could have done that better" or she "could have done that, if only I would have had more time." Anna spoke forthrightly and smiled readily as she talked about her students.

Anna's Students

There seemed to be many challenges inherent in Anna's active, busy class of 20 demanding students, many of whom might have been described as 'at risk' because of their backgrounds and academic achievement. Anna noted that

> half of them are working towards a Grade 3 level in language arts, and a couple of them were just beginning the Grade 3 level when they came into Grade 4. So we're dealing with a lot of low children, both in language arts and math but especially in language arts. (T I A1 January 17, 2001)

Of the 20 students, at least half appeared to have short attention spans and impulsive behaviours. Anna said that the large majority of students came from homes where reading was neither modeled nor visible; and with 13 boys, it was "very active as a result. The principal last year called it the popcorn class when she was observing them in Grade 3, because they were just constantly bouncing around." Two students worked with the conduct disorder program in the school, and several were on medication for attention deficit disorders. There was a full-time teacher assistant in the classroom to work with Derek, an autistic student with very limited control of speech and behaviour.

Anna believed that her students could and would learn, regardless of their backgrounds:

> What I hope is going to make a difference is that they will come out of here still excited about learning, still feeling good about themselves even though they are, a lot of them, quite low. Maybe what I have to start talking to them about, even though they're only in Grade 4, is that you can eventually go to college. You know, "Just work at it, and someday you're going to get there." All of them come from homes where they haven't had any postsecondary education to speak of. So for most of them it's the goal

> to get through high school. But let's aim a bit higher. Right? (T I A2 March 6, 2001)

It appeared that nothing was left to chance as Anna monitored and accounted for her students' work using assignment and homework checklists, and student agendas were signed daily. In this way she knew which students needed her help, and "if you don't keep track like this, the kids that need it the most fall through the cracks. " Anna regularly provided her students with extra help with their writing during recess and lunch breaks, and since October had run a half-hour-long "After-School Club" for six students. The club met three times a week, and students practiced their reading with a Grade 6 partner and got extra help with their language arts work. Although Anna said that parents do not acknowledge this commitment and effort, it was done "because the students need extra help," and she enjoyed giving it. All of the extra time and energy spent in the classroom was given willingly, because "it's for the kids. It's not fair to them to be a teacher and not do this for them, because we're not just here to babysit and let them play around. We're here to make sure that they can learn." As well, students were often absent from school, so work was collected for absent students and time was found to help them with their schoolwork upon their return to class. Anna's dedication to her students and her desire to provide them with every opportunity to be successful appeared to be key aspects of her practice. It seemed that Anna, with her students, was relentlessly focused on learning.

Exemplary language arts teaching is supported by classrooms where there are clear and consistent expectations for student learning and behaviour (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald

et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). Anna had high expectations for her students, yet expectations were "not so high that they get frustrated and quit right away." Students who strove to reach expectations would "get better and better if they feel they can accomplish something." Anna's expectations for appropriate student behaviour were visible (F N A1 January 23, 2001). Posted on the wall at the front of the classroom was a large banner that said, "Be the best that you can be." Anna said that the first week of school was devoted to learning how to get along with others (such as not using put-downs) and how to work in school. On the adjoining wall, above the students' cupboards and the alphabet word wall, another banner proclaimed, "Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference." At the back of the room a bulletin board, entitled "Character Building," displayed the Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"), and word cards for such attributes as kindness, loyalty, patience, honesty, cooperation, self-discipline, courage, respect, and trustworthiness. Posted on the door of the classroom was a student-generated list that described fairness as sharing equally, following the rules when playing, including others in groups and games, and doing your work by not disturbing others around you.

Anna used "Super Job" coupons to complement the school's initiative of Character Education, in which a particular principle of character building was taught and reinforced in the behaviours of the students. On each visit I observed Anna giving students "Super Job" coupons for such things as completing their homework, working hard, and staying focused and on task. The coupons were deposited in the large container at the back of the classroom and at the end of

each week a name was drawn from the coupons, and the students were invited to the office to receive recognition and a small treat from the school principal. This was the school's first year of Character Education, and Anna said that

> it gives us more of a focus every two months, that we can really look at and stress when we talk to the students. Even today I had a chance right after lunch to remind them that to interrupt the teacher or to come running to the front to start talking to the teacher when she's busy talking to somebody isn't showing respect. And we've talked about respect since September. (T I A2 March 6, 2001)

Anna noted that fairness, respect, responsibility, and cooperation had been taught thus far. This month the schoolwide focus on kindness was visible in a bulletin board display at the main entrance of the school, with a poster that reiterated the golden rule as posted in Anna's classroom (F N A3 February 2, 2001).

Anna explained that students were recognized for growth through the school's reward recognition program (T I A1 January 17, 2001): "We pick several kids at the end of the two months that we feel have really demonstrated this for the two months, and the awards are based on that." The school also gave five awards each month in recognition of achievement, citizenship, environment, and sportsmanship, and a Big Effort award:

> We don't always pick five in each class, but we try. And that's presented by the principal, and they get a gift certificate. The "Big Effort," I tell them, is a very important one. You even get a special ribbon with it.

Anna said that social skills and the development of a work ethic were very important, noting that

> this class has come an amazingly long way since we began in the fall at being able to settle down and work at something consistently for a while. Part of it's maturity, and part of it is just making sure that they're constantly doing it.

"Getting rewarded for it" was important too, Anna said, for "we all find in life, if you work hard at something, there's the feeling of accomplishment afterwards." Anna felt that it was good to have the whole school working on character building, because it made a big difference when they had support from all the teachers to deal with what was happening on the playground or in the hallway.

It seemed that maintaining classroom discipline and the students' focus was constant, but never predominant. Anna used such strategies as counting back from 10, praising positive actions, or quietly passing out "Super Job" tickets. Sometimes individual students were taken aside for a private conversation about their behaviour or provided with a brief time-out; Anna seemed to give children time and space to calm down. For example, while working one day in a guided reading group, Michael's persistent squirming and talking to another student disrupted the group, so Anna asked him to return to his desk (F N A3 February 2, 2001). She welcomed him back a few minutes later when he indicated that he was ready to work, and shortly after, Anna praised Michael for his focused attention. Similarly, when Matthew (who frequently appeared off task and inattentive to assignments) was having a particularly difficult time focusing on his work, Anna asked him to work by himself at the back table, then came over and rubbed him affectionately on the head (F N A3 February 2, 2001). On another occasion (F N A4 February 5, 2001), Anna took Tess aside for a chat after she used a "bad word" in the class, then had Tess work alone for the 10 minutes that

remained of the period. At the end of the period Tess rejoined the class, ready to move on, with no further repercussions of the incident. Thus, Anna seemed to deal with small behaviour difficulties quickly and with finesse, preventing larger problems before they could erupt. Consistently throughout the period of classroom observations I saw Anna's approach to discipline as nonpunitive, because there were no power confrontations, and behavior issues were handled with no visible impact on the flow of lessons. It appeared to me that with the "popcorn class," the potential for student behaviour that could be disruptive to learning was ever present; yet a stronger sense of calmness and purpose prevailed. A foundation of classroom management skills consistent with effective teaching research (Brophy & Good, 1986; Demon-Berger, 1986; Doyle, 1986; Walberg, 1991) seemed apparent.

Despite the challenges of her "busy group," I saw Anna showing enduring patience. When students persisted with disruptive behaviours (such as playing with items in their desks, chatting with neighbours, calling out in class, or arguing as they came in from recess, all of which occurred on more than one occasion during class visits), she spoke to them calmly and quietly. Anna felt that it was important to model patience, because students "have to have another role model too that shows some of the other ways of dealing with problems," and she was able to be patient with her students because she was sensitive to children and their needs:

> I look at kids as people, as individuals, and their needs. It's so easy to forget their feelings and things. So we have to always keep in mind that they're sensitive, that you have to put yourself in their place almost because they are sensitive and they are small. We can do a lot of damage

> if we are not patient with them. It doesn't mean that we're not firm, and it doesn't mean that we don't really get after them. That's another way of showing love. But you have to be patient with them. (T I A2 March 6, 2001)

She said that it takes time to meet children's needs, for children can sense if teachers are rushed, and then they become very rushed.

A positive classroom climate appeared to be created by what I saw as Anna's ethic of care (Noddings, 1992). Modeling, a component of the ethic, shows students how to care and be cared for, and I consistently saw Anna modeling the use of "please" and "thank you" and being respectful and patient with students. It appeared that fairness, respect, responsibility, cooperation, and kindness were not abstract principles of the school's Character Education program, but were expressions of care about which Anna talked with students and expected them to demonstrate. A student who interrupted while his teacher was speaking with another person was asked, "Oh, you know what you've done?" while Anna touched his shoulder gently. With a gasp and an embarrassed look, he answered sincerely, "I'm sorry," knowing that he was not respectful when he interrupted the conversation (F N A8 February 23, 2001).

Students were quick to help their classmates, and like their teacher, they were especially kind and patient with Derek when he had trouble with the computer or dropped a bin of books (F N A3 February 2, 2001). Each week a student was selected as the "Star of the Week" to create and share a personal poster of photos, certificates, and mementos with the class. Anna said that this was one of the ways that she got to know each of her students better and publicly recognize what was special about each child. As well, she said that she

looked at the small, positive steps that had been achieved by her students since the beginning of the year. Thus, Anna seemed to know each student "well enough to see what he or she is trying to become" (Noddings, 1992, p. 25). Students' good intentions and efforts were acknowledged, encouraged, and confirmed. The 'Star of the Week' student received compliments and positive letters from classmates which were compiled into a booklet as a memento of Grade 4 (F N A5 February 9, 2001). Students spontaneously clapped their hands and said "Good job" when a small treat was handed to several students who had been working very independently (F N A10 March 21, 2001). Despite the potential to be otherwise, there seemed to be a friendly, helpful, and polite atmosphere and a warm, positive feeling in the classroom that was typical of literacy-rich classroom environments (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000).

Anna said that from the first days in September she had tried to build community, and "when they bring their school supplies, for example, I say, 'This is what we do in this class; we share'" (T I A2 March 6, 2001). The supplies were then combined and stored so that all students had access to communal supplies such as pencils, lined paper, and tissue. Anna noted that there were many children in the class who could not bring supplies to school, but in sharing, students learned that "we're here to help each other." A feeling of care was fostered, for "there are a lot of gentle, kind-hearted souls in there, but there are a lot that wouldn't, I think, be if it weren't constantly brought up." Anna loved to see her students really enjoy and become excited about reading. She felt that she

was successful when students could hardly wait to get their books and when she saw improvement in their reading and writing.

Teaching Language Arts

Exemplary language arts teaching is distinguished by the creation of a literacy-rich classroom environment where reading and writing materials are accessible and visible (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). It appeared that Anna had created such a place in her classroom. The room was bright, with ample shelving and countertop space for the two class sets of dictionaries at Grade 3 and Grade 4 reading levels, teacher books and resources, and books for student reading. Plastic tubs of information books and novels, labeled in levels of A, B, BC, and C for guided and supplementary reading, sat on the countertops, along with a CD-cassette player which was frequently used when the class sang or listened to book tapes. A CD-ROM capable computer, used as a learning centre, sat in the front corner, convenient to the shelves holding numerous story and disc kits and computer software for student use. Along the front wall were a white board, pocket chart, and overhead projection screen, which Anna used in her teaching, and a bulletin board with the week's eight spelling words posted in card tag. Later these words would be added to the large word wall along the side of the classroom. Student desktops and chairs were arranged in a U shape so that Anna could easily see her students and move to students' desks to provide extra help or a low-key behavioural reminder during lessons. Because Anna typically interspersed large-

group lessons with partner work and sharing, desks were side by side in twos and threes, with room to walk between and around the lines of desks. At the back of the room, a couch and open floor space provided a place for the class to meet for sharing, reading, and presentations. Next to the couch was a table used for small-group work, guided reading, or when a student needed a separate place to refocus and work (F N A3 February 2, 2001). Anna noted that in the past, when she had taught in Division I, she often arranged her room to include reading, spelling, phonics, and writing centres. She said that language arts teaching in Division II tended to focus much more on novel studies and reports, and as such, learning centres for language arts were not a critical part of the room's arrangement.

Recent research on literacy development supports an instructionally balanced approach to language arts learning, in which students are actively engaged in meaningful and motivating reading and writing activities, with integrated and explicit skills instruction (Cantrell, 1998; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). Anna said that her language arts program was based in large part upon a balanced literacy program created by her school district to meet the needs of students who faced challenges in developing literacy skills. She became involved in the balanced literacy program three years ago, when it was adopted as the school's focus for Division I. During her first years of the program, she taught in Division I and became "certified" as a balanced literacy teacher. This involved two years of work with district consultants (who observed and

modeled instructional strategies in the class) and attendance at monthly balanced literacy meetings to learn and talk about language arts teaching. The program had since been extended at the school into Division II, with language arts as a whole-school focus. Anna thought that the balanced literacy program was "really working well" and that it was "a program definitely for a school like this" where you can see the skills building in the students each year. She saw reading, writing, and skill-development activities as critical components of the school's balanced literacy program.

Anna had completed the balanced literacy program training, but she wanted to continue to attend the balanced literacy meetings, which she saw as a support to her teaching. Shulman (1987) identified pedagogical content knowledge (where a teacher is able to transform content knowledge into a form that can be understood by learners) as the key to the knowledge base, and it appeared that Anna sought ways to extend her pedagogical content knowledge in language arts. For example, Anna said that at the balanced literacy meetings, teachers could ask to have something demonstrated if they felt the need for it, so she had asked for a demonstration in the area of writing because she had not taught writing at the Grade 4 level. "So that's a new area for me that I'm working through. And it's interesting, and I'm learning a lot because of the class too. So I get support from them in that" (T I A2 March 6, 2001). As well, Anna said there was another Grade 4 teacher at the school whose area of expertise was writing, so that she could can go to her any time to get ideas and talk with her; she found that "they really help each other a lot." The collaborative sharing of ideas

supports the development of craft knowledge where teacher insight can make sense of whether certain principles may or may not be helpful in practice (Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992); Anna's work with colleagues appeared to support the development of her knowledge of language arts teaching.

When asked whether she felt constrained by the balanced literacy program, Anna said that she had when she first started but did not any more (T I A2 March 6, 2001). She had "adapted to fit" because she "sees that a lot of it works well, especially for the reading and the writing, the basics. It works really well." She thought that the approach in Division II might be more flexible than in Division I, but she said that she was the sort of teacher who right from the beginning said:

> Hey, I'll follow it, and if it works, great. And I'll adapt if I need to, because if it doesn't work for your class, don't do it, because you do what works for the students. And it does work for them, and you can see it coming through, and you can see it building.

She thought that the skill building worked well and that the leveled reading was particularly suited for a class like hers where there was such a wide range in the students' reading levels. Like teachers identified as "good teachers" who judged their success in teaching only in relationship to the work of their students (Brown & McIntyre, 1993), it appeared that Anna taught in ways that she believed works for her students.

For the most part, Anna followed a plan for language arts that was similar to the one that she had laid out last year, and she tried to plan activities that would interest her students and keep them motivated. During language arts time, the class was usually involved in at least two different lessons or activities, as

well as daily reading in their reading groups. To maintain interest and a purposeful pace, lessons and learning activities of 30 minutes' duration or shorter were planned, which she said was compatible with the students' attention spans. When Anna sensed a heightened level of restlessness in the class, she changed her plans and interspersed a song or poem as a more active alternative. "Friends are better than crocodiles," the students sang enthusiastically, as they followed the words in their songbooks; an extra book was given to Jasmine, who had lost hers; then Anna tracked the words with Matthew (F N A6 February 13, 2001). Anna said that singing together was another way that students could practice their reading, and her own musical interest and expertise was accentuated. In flexibly adjusting her plans as she taught, Anna seemed to exhibit the anticipatory preparation of a teacher with a store of craft knowledge that enabled her to "roll with the punches" (Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992).

Reading Activities

Anna's reading program was literature based, with leveled sets of books or novels. Anna said that last year, as suggested by the balanced literacy consultant, she had taught three novel studies. However, by the end of last year the balanced literacy consultants had started to recommend that teachers try to teach up to eight novels each year because it enables the students to read more. Anna completely agreed with the recommendation, because "I found that we were spending way too much time on the activities and not nearly enough time on the reading." This view is supported in the research, where it has been found that the students of outstanding literacy teachers are immersed in reading and

writing (Pressley et al., 1998). This year Anna planned to use eight books with each reading group, and although they are moving quite fast, "it works." Anna said that she had planned fewer big projects to allow more time for students to read on a daily basis in class; students then responded to their reading with smaller, daily activities that typically focus on their comprehension of what has been read.

The class was divided into three reading groups, each of which read a novel at their instructional reading level (T I A1 March 6, 2001). As Anna taught the novel studies, she thought that it was important to come up "with what you want to do with the kids according to your class," just as teachers with a learner-centred approach tend to use whatever learning experience works best for their students (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Last year she planned the two novel studies on her own, but she now uses a set of literature-based novels with guides. Anna did not follow the guides as they were written, but said that she selectively chose, modified, and created activities to meet the needs of her students. She explained that "my low group, which is in the lowest novel, is a very big group of nine kids; while the other two are more even—five or six in each—which is much better." With "such a heavy group in the lower end," Anna had to "really plan carefully what I'm going to do have them do and how I'm going to work with them." Two of the groups were completing charts of facts and information as they read each section of their book, and "the middle group, I'm making up questions for them because their book is a little bit different." The class had "a lot of difficulty working

on their own without supervision," but it was a great help to have the teacher assistant work with one reading group.

Anna felt that it could be difficult to have three novels and three groups of students working, because they have to be independent. Yet, as seen in exemplary literacy teaching, it appeared that preventative classroom routines had been established and that the students were clear on their tasks and their teacher's expectations (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997). It appeared to me that Anna consistently ensured that her students knew what was expected of them and how they could be successful in their work. For example, before moving into the daily reading groups, each group's task, outlined on the white board, was reviewed (such as "When it says to explain, using the text, what could that mean?" and "Yes, use words from the book and the captions"). Each group then met in a separate area in the classroom; or, if they were with the teacher assistant, in the hall (F N A3 February 2, 2001). Sometimes students chose to read with partners, taking turns tracking for each other, whereas at other times students read independently. When they had finished reading, they completed their response activity in their reading duotang. Two of the groups worked on an animal information chart on which they recorded interesting facts as they read; they were to be prepared to share their findings, and the work was handed in each day. The chart was similar to one previously modeled during a class lesson, and the students were now able to complete the work independently. For the remaining group, several comprehension and inference questions were provided

each day, to which the students responded in writing and also handed in to be marked. When the duotangs were returned the next day, a small note provided each student with specific feedback on how the work could be improved. During work time, Anna went from desk to desk and returned often to Jason to help him read from his novel and find an animal fact to write on his chart. When the duotangs were handed in once more, Anna again checked her students' work. Although such thoroughness in monitoring and providing feedback rested on a foundation of effective teaching skills (Brophy & Good, 1986; Demon-Berger, 1986; Doyle, 1986; Walberg, 1991), it also seemed to speak to the sense of care and responsibility that Anna held for her students.

It seemed that by monitoring individual progress Anna was able to support her students' learning needs. Pressley et al. (1998) found that in exemplary literacy teaching, student progress was monitored to ensure a match of accelerating demands to student competence and scaffolding and that the right amount of challenge was provided to prompt continuous improvement. Such appeared to be the case as I consistently observed Anna monitoring her students to see if they were applying the decoding and comprehension strategies that she had taught them. She used an oral reading analysis checklist to track the progress of students and had a school volunteer use the checklist as she read with individual students every Friday. To assess instructional reading levels each term, Anna had individual students read a diagnostic reading assessment selection (which was taped) and complete a cloze reading passage; the information was used to plan teaching and learning activities at the right level of

challenge for the students. Anna explained that although the three reading groups can be flexible, the students had not changed enough in their reading to make any group changes this term; the students in the largest reading group were still quite low (reading an early Grade 3 level novel), but they were improving. Some students needed to have additional help on decoding and word analysis strategies, and others simply needed more reading experience. 'Star teachers' constantly search for ways that work best for each student (Haberman, 1995), and Anna said that she continuously looks for materials, resources, and teaching ideas to help her students with their reading strategies.

The novels that Anna used were organized into thematic units or genres, such as the Fact Finders unit, in which the students were learning to read for information. Whole-class activities included class "read alouds," followed with a class lesson or activity. During "read aloud" sessions, Anna's explicit modeling of reading and writing strategies, typical of exemplary literacy teaching (Wray et al., 2000) was readily apparent. For example, Anna read an information book about animals to the class and then asked students to recall and share facts about an animal, which she recorded on an overhead transparency (F N A2 January 31, 2001). After reading the list together, the information was covered and questions were asked about what had been read. The class read the information again, and then Anna showed the students how ideas and facts from a book could be compiled in a chart. Later in their reading groups, students independently used similar charts to gather information from their own books. On the same morning Anna worked with the class on the concept of *endangered*, first decoding the

word together by analyzing its root word and prefix and then working with partners to "look, lean, and whisper" the meaning of the word. A discussion followed about animals that are "almost extinct." During guided reading, copies of newspaper articles about an oil tanker wreck in the Galapagos Islands were distributed. The articles were difficult for students to read (most students did not receive newspapers at home), so Anna read out loud, encouraging those who were able to join in to do so. As they read they stopped to discuss the words (such as *predators*) and to think about questions that Anna posed (such as "Why do they say that man is the problem?"). The students discussed people's responsibility for the tanker accident and gave other examples of extinct animals that have been hunted or have had their environment changed. Anna cued the students' thinking by referring to the animals in their guided reading books and relating the concept of extinction to the actions of people.

Within the guided reading groups, Anna varied her approach with students. One day students might begin by sketching what they thought an ostrich and a tarantula look like, before reading together about the *puna rhea* (an ostrich-like bird from South America) and the red-kneed tarantula (F N A3 February 2, 2001). Anna asked, "What did you find out that you did not know before?" On another day (F N A4 February 5, 2001), Anna asked students to read their books to find out the countries where the endangered species live, and then she asked each student to locate two of the countries on the globe, "which means you have to cooperate together." The students did not always cooperate, but Anna spoke quietly and privately to a disruptive student and had him return to

his desk until he thought that he had calmed down enough to rejoin the group. Shortly after the student returned to the group, he was praised for his attention to his work. It appeared to me that because of Anna's finesse in helping her students behave as expected, the flow and focus of the learning were uninterrupted.

At the end of the Fact Finders unit, students completed a culminating project of posters or brochures (F N A5 February 9, 2001). Skills developed during the unit (such as writing captions and using facts and main ideas) were incorporated into artistic expressions. As the students worked, Anna moved through the classroom, frequently returning to Jasmine (a quiet and busy student with attention-deficit disorder) who was having difficulty focusing on her tasks. Each time, Anna asked one or two specific questions to guide Jasmine's thoughts ("Now the words to describe," and "You're trying to convince"). It appeared to me that clear, step-by-step assistance was given so that Jasmine could be successful, an approach that Anna consistently used with other individuals as well as the whole class. The approach finds support in research on exemplary literacy teaching, where the explicitness and extensiveness of instruction is varied according to the students' abilities, and the weaker student is provided with more explicit instruction as needed (Wharton et al., 1997).

In exemplary teaching, classrooms are constructive places where students are motivated and excited about learning (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000), and despite the challenge to read at grade level, Anna's students seemed to love to

read. During the Fact Finders unit, students worked in small groups to share their reading books with their classmates (F N A3 February 2, 2001). The students appeared to enjoy the sharing, with students listening carefully to their classmates, looking with interest at pictures, asking questions about the books, and reading sections that interested them. Anna explained that they love to share; she correctly predicted that they would enjoy the next unit, on mystery. During spare moments, independent reading times and "free choice" times, students could be observed eagerly reading *It's a Mystery*, a "read aloud" book that supported the unit's reading and writing activities. Students also seemed to enjoy taking turns using the *It's a Mystery* computer program to test their observation skills, make hypotheses and inferences, read clues, meet an author, and create a mystery story. In doing so, they were learning about the key features of a mystery story and how to create suspense (F N A8 February 23, 2001).

Writing Activities

Although writing activities emanated from, and formed part of, the reading and skill-development activities, time was also taken to teach writing. The students kept their writing in a duotang, which gave Anna "a picture of where they're at." The duotangs held a variety of student writings along with the graphic organizers that had been used to plan, generate, and organize the students' ideas (F N A5 February 9, 2001). There was a letter to Canadian peacekeepers, and a fictional story was based upon the student's ideas about character, setting, problem, events, and solutions as noted on the accompanying graphic organizer.

A sensory wheel organizer (with spokes for the student's ideas about smells, sights, sounds, feelings, touch, and taste) formed the basis for a story about the student's birthday, and information on sequencing words such as 'next' and 'then' had been applied in the student's written biography. Such open-ended and extended writing activities that involved students in higher-level writing and the use of portfolios to compile writing in different styles are important features of successful literacy instruction (Cantrell, 1998).

In keeping with the philosophy of moving from support to independence, and to help her students develop their skills from where they were, Anna pulled together the work of previous lessons to teach her students to write interesting sentences and paragraphs. In exemplary teaching, teachers demonstrate instructional density, where multiple strands from previous lessons are woven together for coherent and meaningful instruction (Wharton-MacDonald et al., 1997). Such was the case in a writing lesson that began with a short sentence such as "The cat ran" (F N A6 February 13, 2001). In partners, students expanded the sentence by adding descriptive words and changing words to make the sentence more interesting. In a reference to previous lessons, students were reminded to use interesting words, rather than overused, "weary" words. As the students enthusiastically expanded another sentence, chatting with partners, Anna encouraged them: "It's so amazing, everyone has such different ideas. You're so creative." Anna then showed the students how several sentences could be expanded and combined to make an interesting paragraph, which they read and discussed together before starting work on their own version of the

sentences. From what I saw as a foundation of explicit instruction, with modeled and guided work, students now worked independently and within 10 minutes were ready to share their three sentence paragraphs with the class. As the selections were read, Anna responded positively and with specific suggestions for each student on how to make the paragraph even better. Anna reinforced the students' use of descriptive words, and in a reference to previous work that had been done in the class, she pulled in the idea of using "who, what, when, where, why, and how." The lesson culminated as students were challenged to choose a sentence starter as the basis of an interesting paragraph complete with title, to be written on lined paper in the students' writing duotangs. It seemed a testament to both Anna's instructional and classroom management skills that the lesson unfolded as it did. As the students began their writing, they appeared to know exactly what they had to do, and there was quiet chatter as ideas were shared.

A feature of exemplary teaching is the expectation that students will be able to do things for themselves; students are taught how to be self-regulated (Pressley et al., 1998). Anna wanted her students to know what was required of them to be regarded as successful writers, and despite the short attention spans and limited skills of the students, she actively engaged her students so that they were successful in the task. For example, Anna guided the students through a process of self-evaluation that provided them with the tools to look at their own writing and see what they were doing well and what they needed to change to make their writing better (F N A7 February 20, 2001). "We've been talking about what makes good writing for the past few weeks, and I want you to think back on

what makes a story better." The students shared their ideas with partners, then shared and discussed as a class while Anna listed the specific strategies that students had been taught to use in their own writing. These included such strategies as stretching a sentence, avoiding weary words, using the 5Ws and H, using punctuation, including descriptive words, adding details, going through each stage of the writing process, appealing to your senses, and having a good beginning, middle, and ending. Anna continued with the guided portion of her lesson and showed the students a 'story checklist,' which included many of the ideas that the students had generated, and an assessment rubric for descriptive writing, which the students had seen before. The story was read together, and then features of the story were compared with the specific criteria listed at each level (excellence, exceeds acceptable, meets acceptable, needs improvement, and not acceptable) of the assessment rubric. After a discussion of each point, the students agreed that the story "needs improvement." Anna then gave each student a copy of the assessment rubric and asked them to select a story from their own writing duotang—"maybe your best, or the story you like the best"—and to use the assessment rubric to "judge it for yourself." Anna told them that in the afternoon they would work with partners to edit their own stories.

Instructional strategies were varied to maintain student interest. Later in the morning Anna asked students to look at a code of shapes and symbols that she had written on the whiteboard, and she asked, "How would you figure this out? What would your strategy be?" The students had been reading about codes in their mystery unit, and they readily accepted the challenge, looking at the

length of the two words and where the vowels might be. After several clues, "peer conferencing" was deciphered. In Anna's class it was important to work and learn together; students would be involved in peer conferencing with their classmates, "where you tell what you liked about their writing, ask what you didn't understand, and give them suggestions" to improve their writing. To model the process, Anna used the same story that students had earlier assessed together and had them tell her both the positive things they saw in the writing and the questions they had. The students' responses reflected the ideas and criteria that they had used to assess the writing earlier that morning and seemed to come easily to them. Then Anna and the students worked together to write out the advice that they would give to improve the writing: (a) Add more feelings, senses, and descriptive words; (b) use a variety of ways to start the sentences; (c) stretch the sentences; and (d) watch punctuation. As the class was dismissed for lunch, they were praised: "Good for you! You've worked hard!"

Skill Development

Although skill development occurred during reading and writing activities, Anna also continued the routine established in the balanced literacy program, with its daily "Word Block" of direct instruction in spelling and word recognition (including word building, analysis, transfer and context, word patterns, sight words, and word-recognition strategies). Exemplary teaching of skills is explicit, with a range of strategies that allow students to learn through multiple ways (Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001). For example, eight spelling words (from the graded lists and word families in the balanced literacy resource

manual) were typically introduced on Monday. Anna led the class purposefully through the new words, using each word in a sentence and spelling it chorally (F N A4 February 5, 2001). The students worked with their partners, saying each word and printing each letter of the word on their partner's back. At other times students clapped syllables or letters of spelling words. The word cards were posted on a small bulletin board at the front of the class and after Friday's test were added to the large word bank wall. Sometimes Anna prepared a short spelling exercise sheet (such as a crossword puzzle), which students filed for homework in their "Word Block" duotang. Students were required to carefully print each week's spelling words in their agenda books.

For a 'making words' activity, students printed and cut apart letters (red for vowels, blue for consonants) with which to build words on their desktops (F N A1 January 23, 2001). Anna began simply, with three-,and four-letter words such as 'oil' followed by 'soil' or 'solo' and 'polo,' then added longer words. Several students had trouble making the shorter words, and as the words got longer, the task became more difficult for more of the students. Anna took time to check each student's work before placing the word card in the pocket chart at the front of the class. With Anna's questioning, students noted the similarities and differences in the words and explained how the words had been grouped into word families. The clues for each word were like riddles, and the lesson ended with a challenge to students to use all of the letters to make the mystery word. Throughout the lesson individual help was provided, and it appeared that the focus and attention of the class had been maintained through a melding of

classroom management skills, instructional finesse, and a patient and positive manner.

Anna also led the class in 'sort and transfer' activities to develop and build on students' understandings of word families (F N A8 February 23, 2001). Students were challenged to use a pattern previously learned—such as "-ight" to sort and list words of that word family together—as a class on a chart or independently in their duotangs. Anna said that she often followed up on a concept (such as using "Y as a vowel") from the 'making words' activities and reinforced it with a singing phonics resource, which she liked to use. Anna noted that "the making words, with the sort and transfer (which involves some reading as well) and then applying it on Friday to the spelling test" is a key aspect of skill development, and she liked the idea that students had to apply what they had learned.

Anna also taught other areas of the language arts curriculum, such as dictionary and library skills. Although these were "listed as part of balanced literacy," Anna said "You have to come up with your own way" of teaching them. Anna's way, observed over the course of the study, was to teach with well-planned and organized lessons, a purposeful focus and pace, and activities that involved and engage her students and build from their levels. In one such lesson (F N A8 February 23, 2001) the class was asked to use their "detective's observation skills" to look at word cards (with two words such as "alarm/alcove" and "flag/flashlight"). Then they were to think about what the words were and what they might have to do with the dictionary. After the students determined that

the words were dictionary guide words, and after Anna demonstrated how guide words were used, each student was given a word card to match to the appropriate guide words posted at the front of the class. It appeared to me that Anna knew that her active students needed time to move around the classroom, and she had built that into the lesson; students took turns placing their cards by the appropriate guide words displayed at the front of the class. Two student helpers then distributed the classroom dictionaries while Anna selectively gave each student two word cards; difficult words were given to a few of the more able readers, whereas more familiar words were chosen for emergent readers. As the students began their search for the page in the dictionary where their word cards were located, Anna went from desk to desk helping students and checking each student's work as the words were found. As in each of my observations, I found it striking that she was able to simultaneously help individual students and support the work of the large group.

Beyond Balanced Literacy

Anna thought that the balanced literacy program seemed to "almost run its own course," but she "keeps going through and checking" the language arts curriculum to keep track of what she had taught or needed to teach. Yet, although her language arts program was based upon the key components of the balanced literacy program, it encompassed a broader range of activities and units (such as poetry, singing booklets, author studies, library and dictionary skills, and Readers' Theatre) to meet the students' needs and interests and the curriculum requirements. It is typical of teachers identified as 'good teachers' that

they have a large repertoire of teaching strategies and tactics from which they choose as appropriate to their specific situation. That situation includes the perceived personalities, abilities, behaviour, and social skills of the students, as well as the subject matter and time available (Brown & McIntyre, 1993). Anna tried to get her students excited about reading by using materials and strategies that she knew they enjoyed, such as rhythm, rhyme, music, and drama. For example, during a two-week period the class rewrote short fairy tales into dialogue formats, which they performed in groups of two to four students, complete with special masks and props (F N A10 March 21, 2001). Anna

> had this book for three years already, of the masks with fairy tale stories in it. And this is the year, I thought, now this is the class that will really take off and get into writing with this. And so I am using it this year, even though I had to wait three years because of the class.

It was important to Anna, as a teacher, to incorporate her own ideas and to put her "own little stamp on it as well for what works." Her own stamp included using her musical abilities when reading, singing, and math were combined for an enthusiastic read- and sing-along of catchy songs about multiplication (F N A8 February 23, 2001). This included a sea chantey about the 'Slinky Sevens' and a country and western style song called 'Calculate to Learn the Eights.' Anna noted that "some kids learn with singing, and this group likes it for some reason. So it works for this class to teach that way. So I put that in. It's not balanced literacy; that's my own idea."

A common feature of exemplary teaching in language arts is the use of authentic literature (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). In addition to the leveled

novels, Anna liked to teach poetry because "it's especially good for readers like I have here; they really love poems like Dennis Lee's" (T I A1 January 17, 2001). She was able to

> do a lot with it. I add rhythm instruments in, I add clapping, different things, just to get them excited about what's going on. And the kids are grabbing the books off the shelf; the Dennis Lee books are in their desks to read.

One of the students took home a Shel Silverstein book to read; the class had studied a couple of the poems at the beginning of the year, and the student had made a list of poems for the class to look at next. His initiative was encouraged, for "you know, he's excited and will maybe pass that on to the other kids." For an author study, Anna chose Robert Munsch, and "it really took off. Some of them were reading everything they could, and again, the lower readers as well as the more advanced ones, liked it. You have to kind of pick and choose." Anna taught onomatopoeia in music class, "then added instruments and sound effects that also match. So there is a lot that you can do." Teaching is a stimulus for thoughtfulness and action (Shulman, 1987); Anna found that ideas came to her as she was teaching and that she would suddenly get ideas when she was busy with one thing, and then she would just "go for it" at the time and write it down later. Other times, she tried to think of ideas that would keep her students motivated, and then she tried to "work it through that way." As the year progressed, "you get to know the students and you get to see what they are interested in and what gets them excited." Anna's teaching practices appeared responsive to students' interests and needs.

Thinking About Teaching

Anna emphasized that in teaching

> the children are first. Classroom management is a very crucial part of teaching, and it's crucial because you are, by doing it, putting your children first. You're showing them that they are important; you are gong to have things well done and well planned.

She thought that subject matter knowledge is important in teaching but also spoke of the importance of learning about teaching, while teaching:

> I think you learn by doing. For example, I took four years of undergraduate honors, and you learn an awful lot of stuff. And it isn't until you get in the classroom that you can start teaching and really start to learn. And a lot of it is there as background, and it might be good to do the upgrading as you're teaching, because then you can apply it as you go. To me, that is—probably would be the most helpful. But [if] it's all head knowledge, it doesn't always work, it really doesn't work in practice; it's putting the two together. (T I A2 March 6, 2001)

Thus to Anna teaching seemed to combine both "head knowledge" (formal knowledge) and knowledge of what "works in practice" (practical knowledge) with a background of life experiences. When asked if anyone can teach, her response reflected a sense of the power that adult models have for children: "Even the parents that are not effective parents are teaching, in that sense. Everybody is teaching; you're always teaching, wherever you are, by how you behave or what you say or what you do." But being a teacher in a classroom is much more complex and not something that just anyone can do:

> I think it's too complicated; there's just too many things that are involved. I know many years ago that you didn't have to have much training. You could just—after a year even in Ontario . . . they would have a one-year teacher college, and away you would go off and teach. That might have worked in those days, but I don't think today you could become a teacher like that. It's a very complex, demanding job today. It's a vocation, . . . and

> it takes a lot of patience and skill and everything. So not everybody can walk into a classroom and be a teacher. (T I A2 March 6, 2001)

When asked what is at the heart of good teaching, Anna replied:

> I still think one of the things a teacher needs, really, is a love and desire for the students and for what they can be and do, and all the rest of it will fall into place. But if you don't have that, and it sounds simple, but if you don't have that, you will never be an effective teacher, because I think the children know that. They know if you're interested in them. And you have to be excited about what you teach too. But if you're excited about what you teach, separately from what the child is or where he is, you can stand up there and be all excited about stuff that's way above their level, and it isn't going to help them any. So it isn't just being exited, again, it's love, it's desire that the students are going to do well (T I A2 March 6, 2001).

Anna seemed to exemplify the qualities of a teacher who operated with a store of accumulated wisdom, where she viewed teaching as more than a job, where there was a passion for teaching and a concern for students that nurtures and cares for them as learners (Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992). Anna said that "children are first," and it appeared that Anna would do whatever it took to make sure that her students learned.

Belle

Belle's voice on the telephone was calm and modulated, but her words expressed eagerness and excitement. She looked forward to talking with me about her teaching and thought that it would be interesting and fun to have another person in her classroom with whom ideas could be shared. A meeting was arranged, and I arrived at the school early enough to walk through the two wings and connecting hallway of the single-story building. The brick and stucco school, built 45 years ago in a neighbourhood of single-family homes, duplexes, and townhomes, offered both an elementary English and Mandarin bilingual

program. The school's main office was convenient to the front entrance, and it was here that I met Belle. Her welcome was as warm and receptive as the feeling in the school. As we greeted each other, a young student came into the office, and she and Belle exchanged a hug. Quips and chuckles were shared with staff members, and when I was led into her office, there was a sense already that humour and relationships were important to Belle.

Belle had an office in the school because she was both a classroom teacher and the school's assistant principal. This was Belle's fifth year in the school; she had been a Grade 5 and 6 classroom teacher in the English program for the first three years. In Belle's third year at the school she assumed responsibilities as a special needs coordinator, and in subsequent years, was designated as the school's curriculum coordinator, then the assistant principal. The leadership assignments coincided with Belle's move to the Mandarin bilingual program, where she taught the English portion of the program to students in the morning and in the afternoon, attended to her administrative responsibilities. Last year Belle taught a large combined Grade 5 and 6 classroom, and this year she had a class of 17 Grade 6 students, where she was responsible for teaching the English curriculum for language arts, math, and science, whereas social studies was largely taught within the Mandarin program. Belle noted that she had "a strength in organizing, which is a good thing; I can see very much how you can put things together." Even so, this was a challenge because the teaching time in the bilingual program was half the time of what a

teacher in a typical English-only program has available to meet the same curriculum objectives (T I B1 January 16, 2001).

Developing Teacher Knowledge

Belle had sought challenge throughout her teaching career, and she was now in her 27th year of teaching. She had wanted to be a teacher ever since she started Grade 1, and she remained impassioned about her choice. Belle had obtained an education degree with majors in mathematics and early childhood, but she explained that although language arts was a more difficult subject for her, it was the one that "makes the most sense" and the subject she loved to teach the most. She began her career as a kindergarten teacher and since that time had taught all elementary grades and worked in five different school districts. This range of experiences seemed to have shaped her growth as a constructivist teacher and the holistic, learning-centred nature of her practice.

Collaborative teaching, where ideas are shared, was the basis of one of Belle's "very best years of teaching" (T I B1 January 16, 2001). With three other Grade 6 teachers, theme units were planned together, and then learning centres were set up in each of their rooms for all of their students to explore:

> We were all working together. That was very neat, because two of the teachers were brand new, first year, and two of us were more experienced. So it was that a first year and an experienced were side by side. And our expertise and experience, coupled with their enthusiasm and new, creative ideas was very powerful.

The strands of working together and sharing ideas continued to weave through Belle's experiences when she was seconded by the Department of National Defense to teach in Germany for three years. Collaborative practice was a focus

for the school, and the teachers in the school "worked very strongly as a team." Again, Belle was involved in shared planning with a team of Grade 5 teachers and the creation of learning centres for their students. "So we became powerful as teachers in terms of sharing ideas, which moved back to power for kids for learning. It really worked together well." There were also many opportunities for professional development with colleagues, and during this time Belle presented a session on cooperative learning and was able to learn about student-led conferencing, approaches which were visible in her teaching today. When Belle returned to her current school district, she once again worked with a Grade 6 colleague to plan and integrate learning activities for students, before moving to her current school. In learner-centred classrooms learning tends to be holistic, and the teacher's purpose is to create learning environments and to facilitate student discovery or construction of knowledge (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Such appeared to have been the case in Belle's significant teaching experiences when she recalled times of collaboration with other grade level teachers, the creation and use of learning centres for students, and a melding of the boundaries between classrooms and subject matter.

Belle's ongoing desire to share and learn, to grow professionally, was an important part of her practice: "I'm always looking for something new and different" (T I B1 January 16, 2001). She was passionate about student-led conferences and had presented her approach to two different schools, where it was adopted and continued to be used on a schoolwide basis. As well, Belle and a colleague had conducted workshops at the school, district, and provincial level

on math and language arts connections (which showed how literature and literature-based activities can develop math concepts). Her knowledge of language arts had been applied in her work for Alberta Learning as a marker and group leader for the Grade 6 Achievement Tests. She had also been a member of an Alberta Learning committee to evaluate the reading portion of the Grade 6 Language Arts Achievement Test and the exemplars for the writing section of the language arts test. Belle had been publicly recognized by her school board for her presentation to the district's principals on the integration of language arts and social studies using learning styles. Whereas a knowledge base for teaching includes general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of content, curriculum, and learners, and a broad view of educational contexts and purposes (Shulman, 1987), Belle's knowledge base seemed to show breadth and depth.

Expanding that knowledge base through ongoing learning was important to Belle, evidenced by her attendance throughout her career at numerous conferences, workshops, and inservices on a range of curriculum topics, thinking skills, technology, and discipline with dignity, which she liked to use in her teaching. A disposition toward continuous learning that improves the quality of teaching and learning is crucial for exemplary teaching (Collinson, 1996). Belle was "not one for a bandwagon kind of teaching" but enjoyed the stimulus of new ideas, so she was always "looking for other things and other ideas and other ways that will enhance what I've already got that's good and solid." Belle said that she was a strong risk taker in terms of her teaching and that she was pretty good at evaluating whether new ideas might work in her teaching. She was open

to new ideas from colleagues such as the school librarian, who has "always got an idea about a book," and a new, young Grade 6 teacher on staff who has "some really good ideas." As well, she spent some time in the Division I classrooms to see how their balanced literacy program works and found that some of the program's graphic organizers (on paragraph writing and comparing ideas) had been helpful this year. Belle also looked outside of her school district for new ideas and particularly enjoyed attending an international thinking conference where she learned more about helping students think critically and creatively. Belle took time to absorb what she had learned, to

> see it as a part of what I can do. I feel that I have a good solid writing program, but I know that there are some things that I can change or alter to make it better. So keep the same basic kind of stance on it, but include the other kinds of things.

She was also aware that she tended "to be one to add on all the time," so she needed to think about "how she can balance this, and what are my kid's needs. And I think I'm pretty good at evaluating when I see something new. It's like I can see how that can work in my classroom." Reflective teachers think analytically about their practice and use their knowledge to make solid, defensible decisions about classroom situations and to guide actions (Norlander-Case, Reagan, & Case, 1999). It appeared that as Belle learned, she reflected upon ways in which her practice and her students' learning could be enhanced. Belle had to be able to "pick and choose for the kids," because her Grade 6 students this year had some very specific needs.

Belle's Students

Belle enjoyed teaching older elementary students, "and especially I love the Grade 6s, even when they're driving you nuts." As she talked, her speech was punctuated by wry, comical expressions, a humour that was readily apparent in her confident classroom manner and as a reflection of her enjoyment of teaching and learning. Belle had taught her 17 students (eight girls and nine boys) last year when they were in Grade 5, and she knew them very well. All of the students were of Asian background, and only 2 out of 17 spoke English as their first language. Belle thought that the students' parents were very supportive, but she presumed that they were not readers and therefore not able to model reading for the children or provide any kind of literacy stimulation at home; the students tended to play computer games or watch television in the evening. Belle noted that for the first time in years all of her students were basically at the same level and, as English as a Second Language (ESL) students, faced similar challenges in language arts. They had only a basic English vocabulary and had difficulties in "subject-verb matching" and using the correct tense: "They go from present to past all within the same passage." The students were not very descriptive in their writing and "tend to be very bare bones about it." Belle was concerned that her students lacked experience in reading and speaking English and the kind of interaction with family members and within the community that could help their social and language development; 16 of her students were not involved in any kind of extracurricular activities. When asked about the students' behaviour, Belle said that there were no classroom or playground issues; an

observation borne out during the course of the study. The students were extremely quiet, orderly, and attentive; and the class expectations were summed up in a simple statement: "Respect yourself and others." Belle said, "We don't have any consequences, because it's not an issue," and "it's terribly unusual" to have such a well-behaved class. The only concern emerged last term, with completing homework for their student teacher, but even this was easily handled: "I talked to them again, and it wasn't an issue. And I think that's part of who I am. They know I have the plan," which means a phone call to parents and completion of homework at school during non-class times.

In exemplary teaching, teachers seem to intuit that ethics of care and respect are linked to knowing students as unique individuals (Collinson, 1996), and it seemed that Belle had worked to establish such a link. To Belle, respect was an essential part of her relationship with students, and "you can't assume it's going to happen just because you're the teacher. I believe you have to earn it from the children, earn their trust and respect, and I feel I've done that." Because of her students' lack of experience in using English and their limited social interactions, Belle tried to start with where the student was; she was "constantly thinking of ways to bring in what they know and include them that way and expand on that." Although classroom time was limited, she talked with her students about the things that were happening in their lives. She asked questions to draw the students out and encouraged answers of more than a few words or a simple sentence. One day (F N B1 January 22) the students told Belle that they would buy new shoes on Chinese New Year's and receive money gifts: "Oh,

you'll be my rich kids," Belle responded, and the students chuckled. The comfortable exchange did not reveal the long and challenging process to build trust and rapport that Belle described, which began when the students were in Grade 5 (T I B2 March 7, 2001). Establishing a connection with the students "was probably one of the most difficult things about moving into the Mandarin program." Belle spoke easily with people, asking them questions and putting them at their ease, but initially with her students she found little response: "They would come in, in the mornings, and they would sit down and look at me. And I would ask questions and nobody would respond. They just looked." A student-teacher relationship may naturally evolve when children have been cared for at home in the same way; however, in cross-cultural relationships teachers may behave in unfamiliar ways, so students may not understand the attempts to care (Noddings, 1992). Conversely, the teacher may not understand what the students know as caring. Establishing a trusting relationship takes longer, as teacher and student move beyond cultural stereotypes to understandings of unique individuals. Belle realized that she was still an unknown entity to her students and that they had to get to know her before she could get to know them. She started by talking about "me and my brothers and sisters and my nieces and nephews and what I did on the weekend. So I was opening myself up. And they seemed so frightened; like, when they spoke, I could never hear them." Belle felt a real tension in the room at first; she was unsure of what to do next, and they were unsure of her. However, with time the students "started to realize that what I said I meant, and my expectations were clear, and that I am quite consistent, that

I'm encouraging." At the same time, Belle was teaching her students to understand how humour can be used appropriately in language and in her own expressions and would often explain to students, "That was a joke." Now, students were able to offer a humorous comment of their own in class. There were smiles and chuckles as Belle said, "Eek! I think your halo is on crooked" and made an imaginary adjustment above the head of a student who had just made a funny comment. Or when the class met in the couch corner, she urged the smiling students to come and sit right up close to her, because "I put on nice clean socks today" (F N B4 February 6, 2001).

Creative, open-ended thinking was important to Belle, who described her students as "very black and white in their thinking; they are not coloured" (T I B2 March 7, 2001). They could "get on this track where they have blinders on," so she tried to help them to "come up with more than one answer for any kind of question." Although "they're getting better at it," Belle found that the hands still went down if a student was called upon for an answer, for they thought that that must be the one right answer. Belle persisted, pushing the risk taking further, asking her students if there "is another way to do this," or "can they think of another word to describe this character?" (F N B4 February 6, 2001). Similarly, Belle found that the students have trouble expressing their opinions, and although they could say whether they agreed or disagreed, they tended to panic when asked, "Why do you think that?" (T I B1 January 16, 2001). If a question with a 'yes' or 'no' answer was asked, "their hands will fly" until Belle said that they needed to explain why they thought that. Students' input was sought, and

their ideas were validated; if students came up with ideas that she had not thought of, Belle changed the plan. Yet, although Belle wanted the students to feel that they had a lot of influence and ownership, she had the overall plan in mind and, ultimately, it was her job "to make the decisions, and so I do. But they think they're helping, and that's really important. It really is." I observed Belle's preference for working collaboratively and for sharing and valuing her students' ideas in the way that she taught language arts.

Teaching Language Arts

It seemed that Belle had arranged her classroom to suit her teaching approach, in which class sharing, brainstorming for ideas, group work, and conferences were consistently observed. The most striking feature of the classroom was the reading corner opposite the door where a freestanding, Victorian-style bathtub was positioned next to a comfortable, overstuffed couch (for Belle's "tubby folks" and "couch potatoes"). This is where the class frequently met for a class conference, discussion, story, sharing, or free reading. There was also a book shelf full of paperback books and novels and a computer which provided Internet access for research and word-processing programs for students' writing. The students' chairs and tables were arranged in six clusters of four, with a pair of students facing toward another pair of students; some students sat in groups of three. Belle liked seating the students in groups because it allowed for interaction and talk time, for her guidance to share in partners or in groups, and for a quick response to "talk in your group and come

up with a plan for this" (T I B1 January 16). Belle randomly created the groups each month and told her students that

> in the real world, you have to be able to work with all kinds of people, because that's what real life is, and you need to practice that now. If you don't get along with so-and-so, you still have to figure out ways to make things happen that are productive.

The students were reassured, "It's not forever. You're not getting married; you're just sitting together." A sense of humour kept the plan in perspective (F N B2 January 25, 2001). Belle often wrote on the whiteboard or on charts posted on the long wall opposite the window wall, and it was easy for students to turn slightly in their seats to see her at the front of the class and to share their ideas with her.

I consistently observed that when Belle taught she asked students to share ideas, respond, and explain the thinking behind their responses. Belle said that initially "they just couldn't do it," and they would sit and look at her (T I B2 March 7, 2001). Strategies that she had used in the past, such as brainstorming, did not generate many ideas, so she started from a "more linear, less open-ended way." Belle had to "learn a lot of things to work with them, to provide them with lots of different experiences." When she felt that she was not making progress, she thought back over the past year and a half and saw that her students had started to believe in themselves and to see that they were valuable and that they did have important things to say. With her help, the students were gaining in their confidence and ability to work in a classroom where they were responsible for thinking and constructing knowledge. Now the students' hands were up, and when asked to explain,

> most of them will stay up. And so they're able to explain from sort of the inside of them out. So I'm hoping this has developed as part of them, as opposed to just this covering that goes around them and looks after them.

Belle taught language arts using authentic literature (such as novels and poetry) rather than textbooks. When she was interviewed for the teaching position in Germany, she told the principal that she was familiar with various reading series. However, "if you're telling me that I have to teach with those reading series, then I'm not the person to be teaching in your school" (T I B2 March 7, 2001). Belle said that she was the only teacher in her current school who did not use a reading program or text to teach language arts, because she preferred to use novel studies and "more open-ended, creative activities" in which her students could "express themselves." At the same time, she was also aware that "things have to be very cut and dried sometimes, and we've got to get that base." Belle said that she was not the kind of teacher who on a certain date was on a certain page with pencil and paper exercises; but rather, she was somewhat "all over the place and then bring it together." When the whole-language approach came in, Belle was able to "take what I believed worked with kids and what my experience had told me worked with kids" and to add new ideas to what she already had to make it even better. The school had adopted a balanced literacy program in Division I, which would gradually extend each year into all of the grades. Although Belle was interested in using some of the ideas from the program, she was somewhat apprehensive about it, because she tended to "want to stretch and grow like this and not be prescribed." Belle felt very solid and grounded in her teaching practice, derived from her years of

experience and from the diversity in her positions and the variety of places that she had been. Belle said that she taught language arts in the way that she though worked best for kids.

Belle liked to teach language arts using open-ended projects, where ideas are shared and discussed amongst many people, where one idea leads to another, and as ideas multiply, the learning process is widened. In a constructivist teaching approach, prior student knowledge is activated, and knowledge is actively processed and applied in meaningful ways (Glatthorn, 1997). This was apparent in Belle's practice. She often asked students to tell her what they knew about a particular topic: "I'm curious to see how much you know about published books. What are the different parts?" (F N B6 February 21, 2001). Then she built from that point. Lessons typically began with a large-group discussion to brainstorm ideas, build on ideas, or talk about what they were doing. Belle said that several years ago she and a colleague had developed a number of thematic units which incorporated different learning styles. She continued to use them as a basis over the years, yet she said that they never look the same because they change to reflect the needs of the students and changes in curriculum.

Henderson (1996) noted that constructivist teachers plan, act, observe, and evaluate as part of a fluid planning cycle; curriculum materials are adapted to fit the teacher's view of teaching and learning, and they plan in an exploratory and experimental spirit. Such fluid and exploratory thematic planning was evident in Belle's biography research project (F N B2 January 25, 2001). Belle felt that it

was nice being a "tried and true teacher," and although she had never done this particular project before, she said that she "could see it, and how it would all work and flow and fit together. That's the joy of being experienced. It seems to all come. I've seen and done so many things; I know how it works." The project began with class brainstorming about heroes or heroines, and the descriptive words and phrases were visible on chart paper displayed in the classroom: *have power*, *do good things*, *save lives*, *inventions*, *smart*, *courageous*, *brave*, *responsible*, and *defend justice* (F N B2 January 25, 2001). The chart also included ideas about where information on heroes and heroines could be found. Similarly, a mind map (or web) of brainstormed ideas which outlined the categories of information (such as personal information, accomplishments, and other interests) that students would encounter as they conducted their research was posted in the classroom. Each student had selected a person of interest to learn about, including scientists and inventors as well as the pop culture and sports stars unique to preteen interests. Students now jotted down notes as they gathered information from various sources, such as books, magazines, the Internet, and electronic encyclopedias; then they listened carefully as Belle helped them categorize their notes. Two students who had already made a start on this process were asked to tell the class what they had done. Belle expanded on their brief responses, praised them for their work and for being "super organized," and showed the class Jessica's system of numbering her ideas according to its category so that she could write her report. (Later, Belle commented that, having seen it done this way, most students would copy it,

because they were not original thinkers but tended to follow patterns). The students were reminded to list their references in a bibliography, and after a show of hands to find out where each student was in the research process, Belle said, "It sounds like everyone has a job to do." Independent work time began: Two students went to the library, one student used the classroom computer to find information about a skateboarder on the Internet, and the rest of the students wrote and organized their research notes. Belle went from student to student, questioning and commenting on their ideas and on their next steps. Before the end of the class, Belle convened the group and clarified her expectations for when the rough draft and then the final edited copy of the research report should be ready.

Over the course of the next few weeks, the biography project continued to evolve, as Belle shared the "big picture, just to let you know where you are headed," then worked with the smaller pieces of the picture to ensure student success each step along the way. Belle asked the students what they should do to write an excellent report, "because you are the kind of people that would like to give yourselves an 'A'" (F N B3 January 30, 2001). Again, the students' ideas were shared and charted. The students were praised for their ideas, which showed that good writing should attend to organization, conventions, content, sentence structure, and vocabulary. The written report was only one part of the project, and students began to plan an interview in which they would assume their character's role and respond to 10 interview questions that they would prepare in advance for Belle. Consistent with Belle's focus on encouraging

thinking, the interview questions had to be written so that explanations, rather than 'yes' or 'no' answers, could be given. Belle referred to the display of hats (based on Edward de Bono's work on creative thinking) on the front bulletin board. She said that it was important for her students to develop thinking skills, and the hats were used to illustrate that there are different ways of thinking about an issue (such as facts, feelings from the heart, positive and good, critical and bad, creative, and making it happen). To encourage creative thinking, half of the questions had to be based upon the "thinking hats." A student-created portrait of the famous person would complete the project, and large white drawing paper was handed out for the students to use at school and at home. "Ah, junior high material; I can see it happening," Belle said as students took out their student agendas to make a note of the due date and the date of their class presentations. Such references, which acknowledged the students' abilities to think about what they needed to do without being told, were frequent; and they seemed to reinforce Belle's expectations for, and fostering of, self-regulation and independence in her students.

On the day of the presentations the students were excited and well prepared, but as Belle had privately predicted, little dramatic flair was seen in their mannerisms and costumes (F N B5 February 12, 2001). With quiet voices and signs of nervousness, the students answered the prepared questions and the spontaneous questions posed by Belle and their classmates. Belle's questions of the students seemed to accentuate the importance of growth and experience: "What did you dream of doing when you were young?" and "Do you

think you made a difference in people's lives, and why?" They also suggested the value that Belle placed on working productively and cooperatively together: "How did you earn their respect?" "What do you think would make a good team?" and "What qualities would people need to be on a team?"

Collinson (1996) noted that one of the most important aspects of exemplary teaching is the structure of a safe environment in which students are encouraged to take risks and make mistakes. Belle encouraged her students to take risks, and she seemed to support their efforts and progress in stretching their comfort zone (such as when they learned how to do peer conferencing or when they presented their research project to the class). She said that she was gradually helping her students to see the difference between "mistake" and "failure" and to understand that when something does not work, it is an opportunity to learn. In Belle's view the biography project was much more structured than the way in which she had taught in the past, but to the students it would have seemed very open ended (F N B5 February 12, 2001).That, coupled with the public speaking, made it a high-risk project for the students. She said that "each time you push and stretch, you have to pull back to regain confidence." Now she would pull back to something safer and fun, such as a poetry unit.

The poetry unit showed the same kind of fluidity and evolution of planning apparent in the biography unit. Belle had an overall plan in mind and then made sure that the students "know where they are headed" with the goal of creating and publishing their own booklet of poetry. Along the way, the details of what

kinds of activities would best help the students meet the larger goal were added. Students had opportunities to listen as Belle read selections from the stacks of poetry books signed out from the school library (F N B7, February 27, 2001). When a Shel Silverstein book was selected, she told students that she loved his poetry because it is so descriptive and humorous. Belle briefly introduced each book to the students, pausing from time to time to read a poem that caught her eye. There was class time for students to read poetry independently, for enjoyment. The students were taught how to write poetry in different forms, and *For the Love of Language* (Cecil, 1994) was referred to as an excellent resource of poetry formats and poetry teaching ideas. Belle selected several forms of poetry for the students to model in their own poetry writing. One of the first poems taught, a symmetry poem, built upon and extended the use of descriptive language about people that was developed in the biography project (F N B6 February 21, 2001). To introduce the symmetry poem, Belle began by contextualizing the notion of symmetry and relating new knowledge to prior knowledge. The concept of symmetry in math, letters, and words was discussed, and then the students were shown that a poem's syllabication and phrasing can be symmetrically written. Together, Belle and the students wrote a poem about their student teacher. As the students brainstormed characteristics and descriptive phrases, Belle recorded their ideas. Half of the students readily responded, and the remaining students watched with interest but did not put up their hands. Each of the students was urged to contribute, because even a word could trigger an idea for someone else to "piggyback" on; and a hesitate student,

whose hand was not quite up, was reassured that the class could help with his idea. After a period of careful crafting and selecting of just the right phrases, the poem was completed and a student who had not shared any ideas was asked to read it to the student teacher. Belle said later that she decided to continue the modeling and creating of the entire poem together because students seemed to need more support to generate ideas and that, even so, some of the quiet ones would have problems writing their own poems. Also, she thought that it would not be fair to her student teacher to stop halfway through the writing of her special poem. Belle's relationships with people showed care and consideration.

As the poetry unit progressed, Belle continued to help her students to express ideas and to extend their vocabulary. On another day, when students had written their own symmetry poems, Belle told them that they would be sharing and editing their poems to make them even better (F N B7 February 27). A process of peer conferencing was used, and students circled their ordinary words, listened to suggestions from others, and searched the dictionary and thesaurus for words to use instead of ordinary words. The students used words such as *good*, *mean*, *happy*, *kind*, and *great*; and Belle went from group to group, asking specific questions (such as "What is it about that person that is 'good'?") to help guide the students' thoughts. Throughout the unit, large-group modeling, partner sharing, and group conferencing were used to develop expressive and descriptive vocabulary, and sometimes groups of students worked together to write a group poem. While writing diamantes (F N B8 February 28), some of the students found new and interesting words to use, such as *compassionate* ("Do

you know what that means?") and *cascade* ("What a wonderful word you've chosen to describe the water!"). At the end of the unit each student's laminated, coil-bound booklet of edited poems indicated that progress in writing expressively was being made.

Belle said that her students developed and applied their reading skills as they worked on projects and within other curriculum areas. For example, a chart on the wall listed the vocabulary that students had been learning during their study of aerodynamics. Belle also liked to use a literature-based approach to reading because she thought that by using selected novel studies, rather than a reading series, she was better able to meet her students' needs and to "expose them to the beautiful language of the world" (T I B2 March 7, 2001). At the same time, with this group of students, she found that she had to choose each novel much more carefully. One of the novels that she used last year was "rich with language, beautifully written, and the images are lovely, but they were lost when the children had trouble finding the story line." Belle had already taught a mystery novel this year and would likely choose two more. In the interest of her own growth and learning, as well her students', she wanted to choose different novels from those that she had done in the past. Typically, exemplary teachers tend not to repeat the same plans or lessons, because each group of students is different, and teachers enjoy the challenge of finding more interesting and creative ways to design themes or lessons (Collinson, 1996). Belle said that she read to her students each day, not only for enjoyment, but also for the extra experience of hearing English language. As she read, she would stop and ask students to help

explain new vocabulary (such as "abandoned"), and to predict what might happen next (F N B4 February 6, 2001). She felt that it was exciting to "see the lights go on" as they understood what the vocabulary words meant in the context of the story. The students also visited the library each week to take out their required Mandarin and English books. Belle said that they were "pretty good about taking out the YRCA (Young Reader's Choice Award) books, which are "good kid books in lots of ways" although they may not stand as "really good quality literature." She noted that students tended to choose quick, easy reads, and although there are a couple of "readaholics" in the class, none of the students chose books "with a broad look at life; they go for skinny" (T I B2 March 7, 2001).

Looking more broadly appeared to mean sharing the learning with others, and students regularly worked in small groups or pairs to share and refine their work. It appeared that the physical and social contexts of the activity, and the activity itself, were integral parts of the learning that took place (Putnam & Borko, 2000). For example, social interaction for learning was apparent in Belle's preference for peer and class conferences, which she often used to support and extend the students' development of writing skills. Last year, despite her students' natural reticence and uncertainty in speaking English, Belle introduced a process of class conferencing, "because we were doing writing, but nobody ever talked or shared what they were doing." By using the process, it seemed that she was able to build her students' confidence, support her students in their growth as writers, and foster collaborative learning where students made sense

of ideas through social interaction. To introduce the conferencing process, Belle selected a very capable Grade 6 student who was a good writer and "just confident in who she was" to share her story so that the class would see "that it's not awful, that it's going to work" (T I B2 March 7, 2001). The student was "horrified," but Belle had read her story beforehand and knew that it would be a successful experience for the class and for that individual student. The class gathered on the floor, talked about what had to be done and how it was going to look, and then went step by step. "And it worked. And she thought it was okay. It felt good for her, and the kids could see that what they had to say was valued and listened to." As a member of the learning group, Belle did not take a teacher role, but put her hand up just like the students to offer a compliment, a question, or a suggestion. After a period of time, when the class had completed some more writing, Belle told the students that she was again looking for somebody to share, "thinking I'll open it up and see if this will happen." Somebody volunteered, and the class went through the process again. Belle was then able to say, "By the end of the year, I expect that everyone will have volunteered to share their story."

> And we did, we did. But there was so much, I mean, the paired sharing happened which was safe. We did group-of-four sharing; you know, there were all those things that were setting up for the next kind of thing. But yeah, it was really hard.

It seemed that the students not only learned ways to strengthen their writing, but they also learned to take supported risks and to interact as members of a learning group. Now in Grade 6, the students readily continued the conference process, listening to classmates read their writing selection, giving compliments, asking questions, and offering suggestions (F N B4 February 6, 2001). The

students came to the reading corner, where they were reminded that it was "not good manners to be spread so far away that you don't appear interested, so please consider this when you go to the rug." As the conference began, Belle also reminded them that she was keeping track of who gave compliments and suggestions, and at the end of the conference she read her list, saying, "These are the people who participated today." Thus Belle heightened the accountability and encouraged more participation from her students.

Belle's preference for collaborative practices was seen not only in her regular use of class and peer conferences, but also in student-led conferences in which students share their progress with their parents (F N B9 March 19, 2001). The students were familiar with the process, and student preparations for the end-of-term conferences included (a) preparing an agenda, (b) writing a letter to their parents, (c) setting and writing goals for the next term, and (d) selecting work for parents to look at. To help students think about the learning activities of the past term, Belle had each student create a "mind map." It seemed that just as Belle liked to see the big picture when she began a unit, so too did she encourage her students' holistic thinking. Students were asked to first think of the broad subjects and topics that they had studied, and then to add to their mind maps the specific details about what they had learned within each area. As students worked on these webs, the vocabulary for each unit of study was reinforced; students could be observed using the chart of words from their science unit and looking through their binders and folders. When the students wrote to their parents about the areas in which they had made positive gains,

they were reminded that they needed to also explain why they had done well in a particular area. Belle noted that positive growth is not only in academic achievement, as she told her students that they could choose to talk about their strengths in curriculum areas and in an area of their social development. As students wrote about the things that they would do differently so that they could improve, Belle asked for specificity and details: "How will taking more notes improve your social studies?" and "Why did learning in the math lab help you?" As with all of her lessons, skill development was embedded within the content; Belle guided and modeled the writing process, and the students' suggestions for interesting ways to start sentences were noted on the whiteboard. Belle's expectations were clear as she told students that the ideas and the spelling, grammar, and punctuation must be excellent, and the students proceeded to work independently. Part of the work time was spent talking with Kerry. Kerry had written that he was good at working in groups, and Belle told him that this is something that she did not see happening and that it was a big challenge for him. She told him that what he wrote needed to be realistic and possible, and then she affirmed the other ideas that he had written down.

When Belle reflected on the work that she had done with her students to this point, she often felt that it was never as good as she wanted it to be and that there was always something more to do. As an example, Belle talked about the students' writing and her disappointment with their biography projects (T I B2 March 7, 2001). She said that "most of their writing did not come to life in terms of the person they wrote about," and although students had made progress in

such things as content, organization, and conventions, writing with rich vocabulary, description, and feeling continued to challenge them. She thought that she was "missing a connection somewhere" that she had not yet figured out despite having tried "umpteen different ways, from the use of literature to taking a simple sentence and expanding on it, to reading each others' writing, to posting good examples, to all sorts of different things hoping that it will work." Belle's next plan ("I have another plan, of course") was to have her student teacher focus on descriptive writing for a three-week period "to see if we can bring that part forward." Belle thought that all of her students would meet the Acceptable Standard when they wrote their Grade 6 Language Arts Achievement Test, but with their limited English background, she did not expect to see many students challenging the Standard of Excellence. Yet, her hopes for her students extended well beyond standardized tests.

Belle hoped that her students would be "successful and productive citizens of this country" and that they would have a good feeling about themselves. She hoped that they would see themselves as worthwhile people who were able to do things and to overcome any sort of barricade that might be in their way (T I B2 March 7, 2001). She wanted her students to develop confidence to take risks in their thinking and in their actions, for "you need to be able to do that in the real world." Taking it one step at a time, Belle hoped that by the end of the school year her students would be ready to make the transition to junior high school. Despite her concern for her most shy and "frightened" students, she said that she tried to step back a little, to "give them that

independence and encourage them to go forward." Belle compared herself to a parent with children moving to the next stage, and she hoped that she would have given them the tools to be successful and to step forward with confidence.

Thinking About Teaching

Belle's thoughts about her own teaching reflected the same emphasis on confidence and realism: "I think I'm confident in who I am as a teacher, so that if things don't go quite the way I've planned, that's what real life is like" (T I B2 March 7, 2001). Her confidence seemed to have been built over time, through varied experiences that had involved collaborative practices, connecting and building relationships with others, sharing ideas, and ongoing learning. It seemed that for Belle the basis for connecting and sharing with others was respect "between my students and myself, between my colleagues and myself, and between the parents." Belle believed that respect is an "essential part of being able to trust and being able to move forward and approach difficult situations." She thought that she and her children shared a mutual respect and trust that had been earned, and she believed that she was respected in her school community as someone who would "do my best job for you and with you." This term, Belle was connecting and sharing with a student teacher. Belle hoped that her student teacher would learn that there is more than one way to do things, that two heads are better than one, and that discipline and follow-through are essential to set the stage for good teaching. She hoped that her student teacher would have fun while "creating the different things" and that she would gain a sense from working with Belle of how important it is that you love your job.

When asked what is good teaching, Belle's immediate response was "passion," that a teacher cannot be a good teacher without passion. Not surprisingly, Belle had many more ideas. Perhaps attesting to her own confidence as a teacher, she said that a good teacher can feel it from within and does not count on another to tell her that she is good. A good teacher has to be a lifelong learner and a constantly evolving person who is "always seeking to improve and to provide better teaching for your students." Better teaching also means modeling for students and being aware of the variety of learning styles that people have and "how you can use that to help your students be successful." Belle thought that success can also be built through experience and that teachers need to have the opportunity to teach the same grade more than once, because "we're always better the second time around." Teachers build relationships with people, and Belle noted that you have to be a "people lover, whether that be children or adults, because that's part of your world." It is not enough just to love children, but it "really helps to understand child development" so that teaching is at the right level for learning, not just for exposure to the content. Although it is an expectation that teachers will know the content or subject matter, to Belle, the "qualities of being a good teacher are more important initially because you could be the most brilliant scientist in the world, but you can't teach worth a darn. So they have to work together to make it a success." Success in teaching, and where she hoped that she would make a difference for her students, laid in fostering their love of learning. She wanted her students to "understand very distinctly the word *respect*," to share the gift of ideas with them

(for there are so many ways to look at things and to solve problems) and to ultimately realize that they are in charge of their own destiny.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The overarching purpose of the study was to understand how exemplary teaching works. The teachers' practice is described in Chapter Four, and in Chapter Five an interpretive account of Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's practice explains how their pedagogical content knowledge is expressed through exemplary teaching of language arts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings and a reflection on the research.

Teaching practice is often judged or evaluated against some kind of predetermined criteria; however, in interpretive inquiry we have the opportunity to learn the thinking and feeling behind teachers' actions. Understanding an individual's teaching performance is an act of interpretation; teachers' constructions of such things as knowledge, pedagogy, and sensitivity to students are presented through their performances (Petrosky, 1994). Therefore, in keeping with the study's conceptual framework, an evaluative or instrumental stance (in which skill and method might be viewed as objective indicators of exemplary teaching) has not been assumed. Rather, the interpretations are consistent with a view of teaching as a complex and uncertain learning-centred endeavour in which "ill-structured tasks pose problems for which there are most likely many approaches and a range of possible solutions" (p. 26). Although it can be seen that exemplary practice is not without skill and method, my inquiry

has been open ended, iterative, and heuristic to afford an understanding of the rich and layered nature of Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's practice.

From the analysis of the data (as outlined in Chapter Three) several organizing themes have been identified as significant aspects of the participants' exemplary teaching in language arts. The findings have therefore been discussed in the following thematic areas: (a) developing as a teacher, (b) knowing the learner, (c) creating a learning culture, (d) teaching for student learning, and (e) expressions of teaching and learning. Each theme is discussed in relationship to Shulman's (1987) knowledge base for teaching, where pedagogical content knowledge encompasses content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of the learner, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values. Embedded throughout the interpretive account is the notion of pedagogical content knowledge where a "wisdom of practice" denotes the capacity of the teacher to transform content knowledge in language arts into pedagogically powerful forms that facilitate its understanding by students.

Exemplary Teaching in Language Arts

Pressley et al. (1998) noted that excellent language arts teaching is complicated, and "until we recognize and honor this complexity, it seems unlikely that we will ever make much progress toward dramatically increasing the supply of exemplary primary grade teachers" (p. 22). The themes are illustrative of this complexity, in that the principles of practice common to exemplary language arts teaching (summarized on pages 54-57) are apparent within the participants'

teaching and are discussed as an integral part of how each participant's teaching works. The interpretations are also situated within the broader context of what is already known about exemplary teaching. As seen in the review of literature in Chapter Two, there is a large body of knowledge on exemplary practice which includes effective teaching research, research on teacher knowledge and reflective practice, and research on exemplary literacy teaching. It will be seen that the findings both corroborate and extend some of what we already know about exemplary teaching in language arts, as well as reveal some aspects of exemplary teaching that have not been emphasized or appeared as visible in the literature to this point. The following discussion constitutes an interpretive account of how exemplary teaching of language arts works for Jean, Anna, and Belle. The account begins with *developing as a teacher*, a discussion of the experiential background that has shaped each teacher's pedagogical content knowledge and practice.

Developing as a Teacher

The formative nature and significance of the teacher's experiential background is clearly evident in the findings and finds support in the literature. Beattie (1995) indicated that the process of becoming a professional teacher is a complex and deeply personal matter, which involves one's life history, one's past experiences, and future expectations. Palmer (1998) spoke of teaching from an undivided self, where

> every major thread of one's life experience is honored, creating a weave of such coherence and strength that it can hold students and subject as well as self. Such a self, inwardly integrated, is able to make the outward connections on which good teaching depends. (p. 15)

Exemplary teaching in this study appears to derive from such integrated and complex threads of personal history and experience. Further, that background of history and experience seems to have shaped the teachers' knowledge base from which pedagogical content knowledge derives, as well as the way in which that knowledge is expressed in practice.

Belle's background has been diverse and varied, but a common thread runs throughout: the significance of the collaborative teaching experiences in her conception of teaching as holistic, open ended, and learner centred. In her experience, teaching can transcend the isolation of one teacher in one classroom who teaches one subject at a time; in contrast, there can be collaboration with others, integrated subject areas, and the sharing of ideas. Jean too experienced this kind of collaborative approach to teaching and she recalled her team-teaching years as stimulating and exciting. She also worked closely with a colleague, a mentor, who helped her see the teaching of language arts in a different way, with pieces that finally fit, so that the "big picture" could be clearly seen. That influence remained strong in her teaching, as even now she likes to conceptualize how each part links and connects with another to form the whole. In practice, Jean's and Belle's teaching reflected a broad, holistic view, in which lots of ideas are exciting and those ideas can be integrated within and across subject areas. Anna's significant experiences seem to have been precipitated and shaped by her personal qualities of perseverance and determination and her passion for helping children. Classroom teaching was a second career, related to her first career of running a music school and teaching piano. She twice

upgraded her qualifications to teach, attesting to the same work ethic and sense of efficacy that she wished to instil in her students. Her experiences suggest that she was a risk taker, from teaching in a private school; moving to another province; teaching disadvantaged, at-risk students; and changing her grade assignment three times in the four years at her current school. Both Anna and Jean contended that their experiences with the complexity and difficulty of life's day-to-day challenges have informed their teaching practice; children are treated gently and with patience, with a confidence that problems can be talked about and resolved. Belle's confidence emanated from being a "tried and true teacher" with a rich background of experiences from which to draw, regardless of the teaching situation.

The importance of the teachers' ongoing learning and reflective practice is evident in the findings, where their knowledge base for teaching continues to grow. Collinson (1996) spoke of exemplary teaching as an ongoing process of "becoming" or a way of thinking that includes a disposition towards continuous learning and reflection, for there is always more to learn and understand, in relationship with new students to get to know. Day (2001) noted that exemplary teaching develops "as teachers become expert observers of students and learning, as they seek continually to learn and grow, and as they reflect on their own teaching and experiences in learning" (p. 216). Such appears to be so, in these case studies. Throughout each teacher's career, opportunities to grow as a teacher were sought, with ongoing learning about teaching, while in the context of teaching. Professional growth for Belle was extensive and wide ranging, with

attendance at workshops and conferences and opportunities to present and share her ideas with others; her expertise was publicly recognized, and she served the educational community with her work on Alberta Learning Achievement Test committees. Although there were colleagues within her school with whom she shared new ideas, Belle found that she increasingly looked beyond the school to meet her learning needs. Jean's and Anna's learning was less public but no less meaningful. Jean fostered her professional growth through close relationships with colleagues and extended her general pedagogical knowledge through participation in a teacher effectiveness program. Her personal interest in the field of psychology and her continued attention to her growth as an individual were characterized within her teaching, where she tried to meet the individual needs of each of her students. The school district's balanced literacy training was welcomed by both Anna and Jean as an ongoing collegial support to their teaching, with monthly meetings to share ideas and learn strategies and regular classroom visits by balanced literacy consultants which provided an opportunity to have new strategies modeled. Through this process, their knowledge of exemplary teaching practices associated with a balanced approach to literacy instruction continued to develop. Anna purposefully chose to continue with another year of balanced literacy training so that she could attend the monthly meetings and learn more about teaching writing at the Grade 4 level.

A hallmark of reflective practice, and part of each teacher's growth, is to relate new understandings to those held to interactively reconstruct and refine

existing understandings and knowledge. The participants' reflective practice, as a component of pedagogical reasoning and action that prompts new understandings through experience (Shulman, 1987), is apparent in the findings. The significance of reflective practice to exemplary teaching has found support in the literature. Henderson (1992) noted that reflective practice supports exemplary teaching, and Norlander-Case et al. (1999) indicated that reflective teachers think analytically about their practice and use their knowledge to make solid, defensible decisions about classroom situations and to guide actions. For example, Belle selectively evaluated whether ideas would enhance what she knew about teaching and learning, and Anna considered new strategies from the perspective of whether she could adapt them and make them work for her students. Jean liked the excitement of learning new ideas, both as they fit into or linked with the larger, overall plan of how she taught and as a catalyst to stimulate more of her own creative thoughts. All three considered whether new strategies would help their students to learn. It seemed that Jean, Anna, and Belle were actively involved in ongoing reflection and evaluation of their teaching practices.

Thus, experiences in varied teaching situations and ongoing professional development played a formative role in Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's exemplary teaching. Each appeared to teach from a background of knowledge from which to critically, reflectively, and, sometimes intuitively choose the strategies, resources, and approaches that they believed would best help their students to learn. Although the link between experience and effective teaching has been explored,

it is difficult to determine the role that experience plays in developing "expertise." It may develop over time; Berliner (1986) suggested a minimum of five years, whereas exemplary teachers in recent literacy studies had a minimum of four years of teaching experience (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). Perhaps more important, Berliner noted that a distinguishing characteristic of expert teachers is that they are capable of "reading a classroom" to make an accurate assessment of what is happening. They appear to hold tacit and complex knowledge about students and classrooms that influences the way in which they organize their classrooms and transform subject matter; there is a sensitivity to perceptual information (Berliner, 1986). Such perceptual sensitivity underlies phronesis or practical knowledge, in which perceptual understanding is based upon being able to "perceive and discriminate the relevant details" within a situation (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996, p. 19). In my case study it seemed that the actual number of teaching years mattered less than the fact that each teacher had the opportunity to develop a store of knowledge from which to perceive, assess, and act on contextual information. It may be that, with experience, practical knowledge or a "wisdom of practice" (Shulman, 1987) develops so that relevant contextual information can be perceived and understood. Relevant details can be found within the context of each teacher's situation, and for Jean, Anna, and Belle, it appeared that the most immediate and significant aspect of their context was the students.

Knowing the Learner

The findings indicate that *knowing the learner* is a significant aspect of Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's teaching of language arts. In this study *knowing the learner* encompasses the teachers' knowledge of learners, care for learners, and attunement to learners, each of which is discussed in turn, and is present in the teachers' practice as interrelated and interdependent expressions of their knowledge.

Knowledge of Learners

Shulman (1987) identified knowledge of learners and their characteristics as one aspect of a knowledge base for teaching. In this case it seems that exemplary teaching exists in relationship to student learning, and it requires explicit teacher knowledge of the learner that is both theoretical and practical. The participants' knowledge of learners included theoretical understandings of child development, and learning modalities or styles. As well, there was a generalized knowledge of what learners at a particular grade level are like. Jean recognized that children learn in different ways and tried to find the way in which each of her students learned best. Learning activities to address tactile, auditory, and visual modalities were then planned, and workstations were used to address her young students' needs to learn through play. Belle affirmed the importance of knowing about child development so that teaching can be at an appropriate level for learning, evidenced in her expectations and support for increasingly independent actions and thinking in her Grade 6 students. Anna planned activities that suited the attention span of her busy group and made sure that

students experienced ample opportunity throughout the day to move around the classroom, work with peers, and actively express themselves through rhythm, poetry, and song. It appeared that although conceptual principles underlay the participants' perceptual or practical knowledge, the teachers' formal knowledge was expressed through teaching in which there is a contextualized understanding of students' needs. "What the teacher knows about students, influences what is taught, why it is taught, and how it is taught" (Collinson, 1996, p. 106). It seemed that exemplary teaching for Jean, Anna, and Belle included knowing their students well.

The importance of establishing a good relationship between teacher and students has been long documented. Gage (1978) presented clusters of behaviours that support the notion of a warm, democratic teacher. Effective teaching research indicated that effective teachers offer praise, support, and encouragement to students and demonstrate warmth and caring for students (Brophy & Good, 1986; Demon-Berger, 1986; Rosenshine & Furst, 1971). In a more recent study, Collinson and Killeavy (1999) found that exemplary teachers believe that a knowing and respectful relationship with the student is vital for the students' best learning and a prerequisite for effective teaching. In exemplary teaching in language arts, teachers hold expectations for their students' learning and hold students accountable; they engage students in meaningful work that supports student learning (Cantrell, 1999: Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000).

The depth and importance of the teacher and student relationship as a prerequisite for learning was clearly seen in Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's teaching.

Anna began the school year teaching her students how to work together, to share, and to build community, and the modeling and teaching of character education continued as an aligned personal and schoolwide focus. Belle struggled to find ways in which she could establish a trusting relationship in which her students could learn to "open up" and share their thoughts and ideas. Collinson (1996) suggested that teaching the same students for two years is "one of the best-kept secrets of getting to know students" (p. 26), and for Belle, such an organizational structure supported her ability to connect with students and develop a relationship with them. Jean taught a combined class of Grade 1 and 2 students, some of whom she had also taught when they were in Grade 1. Since September Jean had taught her students how to work and play together in the classroom, follow routines, and assume important classroom responsibilities as leaders. By stressing and acknowledging positive growth, Jean established a trusting and close relationship with her young students.

Care for Learners

The development of a trusting, caring relationship between teacher and learner is important to good teaching (Collinson & Killeavy, 1999; Cullingford, 1995; Henderson, 1992; Noblit et al., 1995; Noddings, 1992). Such a relationship between the participants and their students is highly visible in my study and finds confirmation in the literature. Studies of exemplary literacy instruction have indicated that exemplary teachers have a strong sense of purpose, hold high

expectations for their students' learning, and emphasize attitudes of cooperation, helpfulness, and respect between students and teacher (Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). Haberman (1995) indicated that although "star" teachers have strong positive feelings and genuine respect for their students, it is their expectation that all students will learn from them (not necessarily love them) that makes a difference in their teaching. In my study it seemed that the participants' desire to foster student learning and meet students' needs was evidenced in each teacher's ethic of care.

> Good teachers do not reject what students see and feel, but, rather, work with what is presently seen and felt to build a stronger position for each student. To do this effectively requires the creation and maintenance of a trusting relationship. (Noddings, 1992, p. 107)

Each of the participants appeared to teach from an ethic of care which encouraged and affirmed the best in students, and they did so in ways that seemed to support the ethic's essential aspects of modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings, 1992). Through teacher modeling, students were shown how to be cared for, and they talked together about what they had been shown. Through the process of dialogue, personal connections were made and maintained, and each person learned more about the other person. Practice provided experiences that enabled students to gain skills and develop attitudes. Lessons and classroom activities not only developed students' conceptual knowledge, but also were opportunities to shape and practice attitudes and ways of thinking about being in the world. This was perhaps most explicit in Anna's teaching, where the students' skills and attitudes of social interaction were

simultaneously taught and attended to within the teaching of language arts. Although Jean's and Belle's students did not require the same kind of constant attention to their social behaviours, the struggles to develop thinking skills and to learn how to learn were equally apparent. Confirmation requires that teachers know their students well, to see the admirable qualities or the "better self" within each student's struggles (Noddings, 1992), and the teachers' confirmation of their students' efforts was distinctive. When Anna corrected a student's inappropriate behaviour, she found a way to affirm what the student meant to do, or was subsequently able to do. Jean saw her students' efforts and struggles to learn as a measure of success, and Belle encouraged her students' increasing independence by relating their ideas and actions to the "real world." Each teacher showed a finely attuned awareness of the strengths of her students and a sense of the positive motivation that underlay all of their efforts; the students' sense of worth, genuine goodness, and ability to learn appeared to be unquestioned.

In exemplary literacy teaching, the teacher holds an appropriate level of expectation and challenge for each student and actively monitors student progress (Pressley et al., 1998). In this case, the ability to simultaneously meet both the individual's needs and the group's needs appeared as a significant feature of each participant's teaching. For Jean, Anna, and Belle exemplary teaching with a large group of students was not only a matter of having a well-organized classroom, with effective behaviour management and monitoring skills (as supported in effective teaching research such as Brophy and Good, 1986; Demon-Berger, 1986; Rosenshine and Furst, 1971; Walberg, 1991). Although

these characteristics were clearly evident, group progress and learning seemed to have been predicated upon the teacher's understanding of what each student needed in order to learn and was manifested in the care and attention that was shown for each individual student within the group. By interacting in personal and meaningful ways with individuals, the focus, attention, and learning of the entire group was elevated. There was a knowledge of students' individual strengths, learning needs, interests, backgrounds, and characteristics that enabled the teachers to connect to each student and to establish personal relationships that could foster each child's growth.

Attunement to Learners

Shulman's (1987) model of pedagogical reasoning and action involves the teacher's ongoing assessment of both the teacher's and the students' performances while transforming content matter into new understandings for both teacher and student. This ongoing assessment, during teaching, is apparent in the findings. It appeared that a heightened sense of attunement to students allowed the teachers to read their teaching situation, and a perceptiveness to see or sense subtle indicators distinguished their exemplary teaching. The teachers demonstrated an attunement to students which was often beyond the students' spoken words or raised hands. Anna's teaching of her demanding class was interplayed with constant attention to each individual. Even as she maintained the learning focus and pacing of lessons for the large group, she personally attended to the students who exhibited short attention spans and learning difficulties. Within each verbal and nonverbal interaction, she seemed to see

whether the student was having difficulty understanding the concepts or sustaining focused attention and to foresee the potential for inappropriate behaviour. A touch on the shoulder, eye contact, or quiet spoken words were as much a part of each lesson as the topic under discussion. Jean saw the sparkle in a student's eyes; it told her that the student had something to say that was significant to his or her learning. She watched her students' eyes "to see where a student is looking" and was conscious of the children's voices and tone; as Jean noted, it was all sorts of clues, almost a felt sense. Belle's teaching demonstrated sensitivity to individuals as she looked for signs of responsiveness from students who had ideas but were too shy to volunteer them without their teacher's encouragement. That same shyness tended to limit the more overt behaviours and verbal expressions that would more readily provide insight into their thoughts.

Attunement to students is not directly referred to in the literature, but it might be considered as a perceptual way of knowing or understanding what the learner needs in order to learn. Henderson's (1996) protocol for constructivist enactments indicated the importance of perception-based participant observation, where the teacher looks for overt behaviour, verbal expression, or more subtle indicators of how students are thinking and feeling to try to understand how students are constructing meaning. Henderson also noted that constructivist teachers pay attention to what students might be thinking and seem to know the right amount of support and challenge to provide and how to develop the students' ability to think. In turn, the teachers are able to anticipate needs,

and constructivist teaching practices are supported. Eisner's (1998) conception of educational connoisseurship is "the act of learning how to see and understand how teachers teach, and what students learn in classrooms," and it "is a learnable skill having to do with the appreciation of subtle and complex forms of performance" (p. 211). Eisner further suggested that a teacher's particularity of perception allows the teacher to apply judgment of a situation and to act quickly and gracefully from a broad repertoire of knowledge. Morrow et al. (1999) found that exemplary literacy teachers demonstrated a high level of "with-it-ness," where they were extremely aware of what was happening in their classrooms and could monitor all students at all times. Although not referred to as such, all appeared to be ways in which the teacher was attuned to students.

A distinguishing facet of exemplary teaching in this case study is the degree to which the teachers were actively attuned to students and were thus able to discern and act upon perceptual information. If teachers are attuned to the subtle signs presented by students, perceptions of what students might be thinking or how students are constructing knowledge might be possible. In this case, it was found that each teacher actively watched for, and was aware of, the overt and less overt ways in which their students' needs and responses could be understood. By being attuned to students, the teachers perceived and appreciated the subtle and complex needs of the learner. It appeared that Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's attunement to individuals, as an expression of their pedagogical content knowledge, worked in concert with an ethic of care to support student learning.

Creating a Learning Culture

We know from consistent findings within teacher effectiveness studies that effective teachers are able to organize a classroom so that learning takes place (Brophy & Good, 1986; Demon-Berger, 1986; Doyle, 1986; Walberg, 1991). The teacher is skilled in the prevention and management of inappropriate behaviours, and there is a system of general classroom procedures and routines that maximizes learning time. A healthy emotional climate for student learning is created. Effective classroom organization and management of student behaviour and learning were highly apparent in Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's teaching, but such a description does not fully capture what these teachers did to create a place where students could learn. Haberman (1991) defined *star teachers* in terms of what their students are doing and the kind of learning environment that is created. In my study, each teacher seemed to create a classroom culture that was focused on learning and where the actions and behaviours of all members of the class were expected to support not only what was learned, but also the collaborative and interactive way in which it was learned. In the participants' classrooms, behaviours that might be thought of as routine or "managed" appeared to be norms of behaviour that were consistent with being a member of a community that learns together. As Anna said to her students, "That's what we do here, we share." Sharing was not a rule, but a way to interact with others that, with Anna's teaching and modeling, became an integral part of the classroom. Similarly, Jean's students had been taught how to use the resources, games, and books in the literacy workstations; but the norm of working together to learn

permeated all facets of daily life in the classroom. Students were frequently affirmed, "That's what good readers or writers do," as they learned to use decoding or editing strategies and to think and act as learners. Even as Belle established a trusting relationship with her students, encouraged and supported them to take risks, and shared the teaching role during peer conferencing, she was affirming her classroom as a collaborative learning culture.

Recent studies of successful literacy teaching have found that teachers create literacy-rich classroom environments to support learning, address students' affective needs, and promote self-esteem (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al, 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). As well, teachers establish clear expectations for behaviour and learning within that environment; a system of procedural routines is in place, and students are taught how to use classroom materials, interact appropriately, and become independent, self-regulated learners. These classrooms are constructive places where students are motivated and excited about learning, and students are actively engaged in the main tasks of reading and writing, most of the time (Pressley et al., 1998). Through teacher modeling students learn to speak respectfully, be helpful, and work cooperatively (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). Such characteristics were apparent in Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's classrooms, where the focus was on learning to work together in collaborative ways that supported students' growth in language arts. For example, Jean, Anna, and Belle structured their classrooms so that the

physical and social arrangement supported interaction and collaborative learning. Within each classroom students worked in the large group, in small clusters, with partners, or individually, which reflects not only the variety of instructional strategies that each teacher employed, but also the inclusive, overall spirit of collaboration that was encouraged by each teacher. Just as each teacher seemed finely attuned to the students, so too were they attuned to their classroom's social structure; organizational routines served as ways through which student learning was facilitated, and students had important responsibilities to fulfill. As seen in the classrooms of exemplary literacy teachers, discipline was a consistent thread in the seamless fabric of the classroom's social structure (Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997). It was preventative, positive, and fair and tended to involve quiet and private discussions to support student learning.

The development of thinking skills and metacognition strategies is an important aspect of exemplary literacy teaching (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). Exemplary teaching appears to involve the intellectual structuring of the classroom (Collinson, 1996), and this was clearly seen in each of the participants' teaching. The intellectual structure was such that students were viewed as both teachers and learners, evidenced in the peer conferencing and partner work in Anna's and Belle's classes, and the expectations for student leadership in Jean's classroom. Each teacher emphasized students' strengths and supported and encouraged students' risk taking. Glatthorn (1997) noted that

in a learning-centred approach students work together as active members of the classroom learning community, where the teaching of higher order skills is embedded within a social context. The findings show that attention to metacognition was evident in Jean's, Anna's, and Belles' classroom when students were taught reading and learning strategies, asked to explain the thinking behind their responses, and encouraged to ask questions. To varying extents, the teaching and learning of language arts also extended across curriculum boundaries. Jean's learning centres integrated curriculum areas, and her teaching in all subjects was based upon her students' ongoing development of literacy skills and concepts. Anna's and Belle's teaching of language arts was more specific to the content area, although opportunistic teaching of reading and writing concepts within other subject areas was apparent. Thus, each teacher appeared to create physical, social, and intellectual structures that supported the classroom as a learning culture.

Exemplary teaching might also encompass the teacher's ethics (of care and work) and dispositions (toward continuous learning) as a cohesive and holistic part of the physical, social, and intellectual structures of the learning culture (Collinson, 1996). Such a notion was clearly evident in this case, where the classroom learning community seemed to be shaped by each teacher's ethics and dispositions. Anna's persistence and diligence to foster her students' sense of responsibility was seen in her thorough planning, meticulous monitoring, and consistent expectations for both language arts learning and social behaviour. The classroom environment both reflected and supported a relentless focus on

learning which resonated from her love and patience for her students and her commitment to do whatever it took to help them learn. Similarly, Belle's disposition toward continuous learning permeated her classroom and was reflected in her efforts to foster creativity and risk taking in her students. Through her modeling, and with her encouragement, students were developing their ability to question and explore new ideas, and the use of peer and class conferences reinforced the collaborative nature of the learning culture. Shared leadership, in which the teacher's dispositions and ethics were modeled and emulated within the students, was a feature of the learning culture within Jean's class. All three teachers stressed positive intellectual growth to develop students' sense of efficacy as capable students who could read and write successfully and as students who could learn how to learn. The findings support the notion that the essence of exemplary teaching is apparent in the quality of learning experienced by the students; good teaching exists in relationship to student learning (Brown & McIntyre, 1993; Common, 1991; Harris, 1999; Macrorie, 1984). Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's teaching approaches, structures, ethics, and dispositions coalesced as an expression of their pedagogical content knowledge and were embodied within their classrooms as learning cultures that supported student learning.

Teaching for Student Learning

There is considerable literature which indicates that the essence of exemplary teaching lies not in what the teacher does, but in the quality of learning experienced by the students (Brown & McIntyre, 1993; Clark, 1995; Common, 1991; Harris, 1999; Macrorie, 1984; Sotto, 1994). Exemplary teaching

appears to be a multilayered relationship between teacher, student, and subject matter. Stones (1992) suggested that quality teaching involves teachers as inquirers who attempt to solve pedagogical problems; they are concerned with the conceptual structure of the subject matter and teaching for meaningful learning. Palmer (1998) saw a synthesis of student, teacher, and subject, in which the subject matter is the connective core and where the "best features of teacher- and student-centred education are merged and transcended by putting not the teacher, not the student, but subject at the center of our attention" (p. 116). Although the emphasis on teacher or subject matter might differ, each conception illustrates the triadic interplay of teacher, student, and subject that underlies pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Exemplary teaching rests upon a professional knowledge base where knowledge of the subject matter, the learner, and pedagogy form the substance of the base and where pedagogical content knowledge is the capacity of the teacher to transform that subject matter knowledge through instruction to facilitate its comprehension and understanding by others. Such teaching is pedagogically powerful, yet adaptive to contextual considerations such as the variations in ability and background of the students and the nature of the subject area. In other words, exemplary teaching encompasses a "wisdom of practice" that is a combination of pedagogical skill and subject matter understanding, adapted to the characteristics of the students. Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's teaching of language arts appeared to involve subject matter understanding and pedagogical skill. In my study, within the classroom as a learning culture, where teachers are attuned

to students, where students are cared for and their learning needs are understood, the teachers' knowledge of language arts and how that knowledge becomes the students' knowledge are important facets of exemplary teaching practice. The theme of *teaching for student learning* expresses Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's knowledge of language arts and knowledge of teaching strategies, as well as their emphasis on teaching students to learn, constructivist teaching approaches, and dialogic interaction within the classroom.

Knowledge of Language Arts

Content knowledge is a part of the knowledge base for teaching (Shulman, 1987). The findings show that all of the teachers have extensive knowledge of language arts which had been gained through study and experience and had been prompted by their personal interest in, and enjoyment of, both the content and the teaching of language arts. For all three, content knowledge was cohesively meshed with knowledge of teaching approaches gained through experience and professional development, and very much embedded in knowledge of the language arts curriculum. Anne had taught language arts in all of her Division I and II assignments, and Jean and Belle had varied experiences in using thematically based learning centres and whole-language approaches. For all teachers, curriculum knowledge was broad and extensive, which enabled them to teach several curriculum objectives simultaneously within language arts lessons and within other subject areas. Jean mentally "checked off" curriculum objectives as they were taught and reinforced in the learning centres and during the daily calendar exercises and group

studies addressed muluple learning outcomes, and Anna cross-checked the objectives of the balanced literacy program with the language arts curriculum, and tracked her students' day-to-day progress as they achieved language arts objectives. All three teachers liked learning new ideas about language arts and thinking about how those ideas could be used in their classrooms. Jean had a vast repertoire of games and was constantly thinking of new, interesting, and fun ways that concepts could be learned. Anna liked to build on the strategies of the balanced literacy program and incorporate her own ideas, and Belle visualized the entirety of a concept before building it together with her students. As each teacher constructively incorporated new understandings with her own ideas, knowledge of the subject matter appeared to blend with knowledge of teaching approaches and knowledge of the students. Each teacher spoke of the importance of knowing the subject matter but said that enthusiasm for, or expertise in, the content area is not enough; the teacher's approach to the subject must enable students to learn. Each teacher wanted her students to get excited about reading, to become successful readers and writers, and to enjoy learning. Although language arts is the "connective core" of subject matter which links student and teacher (Palmer, 1998), it was apparent that the teachers' knowledge of language arts was activated by their hopes and desires for their students. Content knowledge, for these teachers, was important as it was enacted through approaches that worked for students.

Knowledge of Teaching Strategies

Shulman (1987) indicated that general pedagogy forms part of a knowledge base for teaching. Although there is no one right or best way to teach (Greene, 1986; Sotto, 1994), it appeared that the participants' teaching of language arts was informed by knowledge of generalized effective teaching practices as well as practices specific to exemplary teaching in language arts. This finds confirmation in the literature, in that effective literacy teaching involves general effective teaching methods such as modeling, practice and repetition, varied grouping (whole group, small group, and individual), sensitivity to individual needs, and integration of literacy instruction within the rest of the curriculum, as well as effective instructional practices specific to literary instruction (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996). Considerable research indicated that effective teaching shares common features, such as a focus on clear objectives and the use of varied materials and resources to support well-planned and interesting lessons and assignments (Brophy & Good, 1986; Demon-Berger, 1986; Doyle, 1986; Walberg, 1991). New information was structured for students with cues and organizers that showed students what they were to learn and how it could be accomplished. The teacher modeled, clarified, and questioned for student understanding and provided feedback. Students were actively engaged, with time for practice and independent work. Such teaching strategies, as noted in effective teaching research, were clearly evident in this case study. Each teacher clearly communicated expectations for both learning and behaviour and monitored group and individual progress through the use of anecdotal records,

checklists, homework agendas, assignments, and diagnostic reading passages. The teachers used a range of teaching resources (including manipulatives, games, authentic literature, software applications, music and poetry booklets, newspapers, prescribed texts, and teacher-designed resources) and they varied their teaching along a continuum of modeled, shared, guided, and independent approaches. Students were provided with both oral and written feedback on their work, and there was a strong emphasis on ensuring (through such means as models, rubrics with criteria, and clear instructions) that students knew what was required for them to be successful in their work.

Despite the uncertainty of teaching, with its ill-structured goals and tasks, there does seem to be a parameter within which principles of exemplary teaching of language arts can be described, as well as some predictability as to what might be expected in classrooms where exemplary language arts teaching occurs. Gambrell and Mazzoni (1999) indicated that even as exemplary teachers "custom fit" their teaching to the strengths and needs of students and their teaching situation, there appear to be principles of research-based "best practices" (based upon a rich model of the reading process) that "provide children with both the *skill* and the *will* they need to become proficient and motivated literacy learners" (p. 13). The goal of "best practices" in literacy instruction is to develop high-level thinking and strategic readers and writers; "best practices" are grounded in a balanced approach with the teacher as the active and informed decision maker (Gambrell & Mazzoni, 1999). Studies regarding the nature of exemplary literacy teaching are consistent in their

findings (Cantrell, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). As seen in the review of literature in Chapter Two, exemplary literacy teachers employ a large repertoire of strategies to meet student needs, integrate reading and writing, and engage students in learning. Skills are taught in multiple ways, explicitly and along a continuum from direct instruction to whole-language approaches. Students are immersed in varied reading and writing activities that are based upon authentic literature and, often, integrated within other subject areas. Guided reading, teacher modeling of reading and writing strategies, and constructive feedback provide scaffolds for increasing students' independence in learning. Further, exemplary literacy teaching is distinguished by meaning-centred, constructivist approaches in which an appropriate level of challenge and support is provided for each student (Pressley et al., 1998). The teachers' modeling of their thought processes and their use of higher-level questions provide insights into the ways in which students are processing ideas and constructing meaning; students are helped to become aware of their own metacognition processes.

These strategies were clearly evident in the teachers' practice, as described in Chapter Four. For example, Jean's and Anna's teaching strategies for reading included "Read Aloud" sessions (in which the teacher modeled reading strategies) and shared reading sessions, in which students read along and were taught contextual decoding and comprehension strategies. During daily guided reading, when students are grouped according to their instructional levels, Jean and Anna monitored their students' growth and taught skills and reading

strategies to meet individual and group needs. Reading for meaning was stressed; for example, Jean asked her students to tell her the strategies that they were using as they read, and Anna asked her students to think not only about what happened, but about *why* it might have been so. Similar kinds of teaching strategies were used to teach writing, where teacher modeling, then guided practice led to independent student work. Teaching strategies to develop skills were explicit (as in the "making words" and spelling practice activities) as well as embedded within authentic literature and across subject areas (seen, for example, during guided reading sessions and in "teachable moments"). Belle's teaching strategies were equally purposeful and varied, with strategies designed to actively engage students in their development as thinkers and learners. Brainstorming and concept mapping, the use of graphic organizers, peer editing and review, shared expectations and clear criteria for assessment, and project work, along with teacher modeling and guided experiences, were part of Belle's broad repertoire of teaching strategies. It is important to note that all three teachers employed teaching strategies that maximized their students' engaged time in learning. Pressley et al. (1998) found that in successful language arts classrooms, 90% of the students are actively engaged more than 90% of the time. In my study, classroom observations confirmed that each teacher expected students to be working at all times, so she organized the classroom, structured the lessons, and monitored the students carefully to ensure that this happened. In Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's teaching, it appeared that knowledge of effective teaching strategies, and of specific strategies aligned to exemplary literacy

instruction, supported the kind of balanced, meaning-centred, and constructivist approach to teaching language arts that has been depicted in the literature (Cantrell, 1999; Lewis & Wray, 2000b; Morrow & Asbury, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000).

Teaching Students to Learn

A focus on metacognition, where students are taught to think about their own thinking, supports the constructivist process of meaning making and was modeled in each participant's exemplary practice. Through extensive teacher modeling, students not only learned how to care and be cared for, and to work cooperatively, responsibly, and respectfully within the classroom learning culture, but they also learned how to learn. The thought processes of the teacher were articulated and made visible; students saw and heard what they could think about and do as learners. Jean taught her students "strategies" and throughout the day asked them which strategies they were using as they read and wrote; she articulated the strategies that she was using, as well as the strategies that she saw the students use. Guided reading sessions focused on finding the meaning of the story; decoding strategies were a means to comprehend or understand what had been read. When Jean taught a new game, she asked the students what they were learning by playing the game. As the morning message was decoded, Jean articulated what students could think about (whether a word family, a vowel rule, or a context clue) to help with the reading. Jean had her students "retell, relate, and reflect" after they read, just as she articulated how

new ideas "fit" or "related" with what students already knew. Similarly, Anna's articulated modeling was an integral part of helping her students think of themselves as capable learners. Motivation and a sense of efficacy were modeled; in Anna, students saw the mindset and work habits they needed to approach a lesson, then virtually every lesson involved modeled and guided concept development where Anna explained and showed students how to be successful in their work. Guided writing lessons actively demonstrated how students could think about word usage, then create and combine interesting sentences so that they were able to write their own paragraphs independently. In a class where so many students faced learning challenges, the phrase "I can't do it" was notable in its absence. Belle's modeling enabled students to share ideas with each other and to make connections between ideas. As Belle drew a mind map or wrote a chart, she drew out her students, showed them how one idea could lead to another, and demonstrated that there was value in each person's contribution. Class and peer conferences were demonstrated and practiced to help students feel secure enough to take the risk of sharing work publicly. Belle asked her students to explain the reasoning behind their responses and taught them strategies (such as the "thinking hats") for thinking about concepts in different ways.

Fenstermacher (1986) suggested that the manner of the teacher conveys as much about the content of a subject as the facts, theories, and insights of the subject itself. That manner, consisting of the moral and intellectual virtues most relevant to the subject area of study education, serves as a model for students

on their way to becoming scholars. A key finding in Wray et al.'s (2000) study of exemplary literacy teaching is that teachers are explicit in modeling and demonstrating the purposes and processes of reading and writing, thus encouraging a "mindful" approach to students' literacy learning. Where teacher modeling has been considered an effective instructional strategy, the critical point appears to be in the "mindfulness" of that modeling: All of the teachers modeled the characteristics of someone who was involved in ongoing learning. They questioned, probed, listened to others' ideas, and reflected upon what they learned. Articulated teacher modeling of how to learn, where actions and thoughts combine and are made explicit for students, appeared to be a significant aspect of the teachers' exemplary language arts teaching as an expression of their pedagogical content knowledge.

A Constructivist Teaching Approach

Shulman (1987) noted that "our exemplary teachers present ideas in order to provoke the constructive processes of their students and not to incur student dependence on teachers or to stimulate the flatteries of imitation" (pp. 13-14). Pressley et al. (1998) found that in exemplary teaching there is a match of accelerating demands to student competence, whereby the right match of support and instruction enables students to complete tasks appropriate to their level of learning. Such scaffolding is typical of constructivist teaching. A constructivist teaching approach that relates to the social aspects of learning was evident in the participants' exemplary practice and has found support in the

literature (Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000).

Constructivism may be an individualistic process of meaning making that reflects a Piagetian cognitive approach or a social constructivist approach in which social interaction is essential in the construction and appropriation of knowledge (Richardson, 1997). In the Piagetian conception, the teacher attempts to change the student's cognitive map by structuring the environment so that previous beliefs are challenged and examined. Faced with dilemmas and cognitive dissonance, the student's understandings are altered, adjusted, or added to. In contrast, social constructivism sees the classroom environment "as a social milieu that affects the actions taken by students and the learning that occurs" (p. 7). In a constructivist view, there is a duality to perception and action; and through social interactions, meaning is both shared within the group and internalized in the individual. As previously discussed, each teacher seemed to create a learning culture within the classroom which was both supported and defined by teaching and learning as a social practice. Socially transacted learning was fostered, and whether paired or clustered in groups, working together in learning centres, or meeting as a large group, students were encouraged to interact and connect within the collaborative learning culture of their classroom. The interactions and connections made by students seemed to depend upon the perceptiveness and responsiveness of the teacher and the teacher's attention to the students' thought processes; attunement to students appeared to support constructivist teaching practices.

Richardson (1997) noted that the formation of constructivist classrooms relates both to the particular content or subject matter and to the degree to which the social aspects of learning are emphasized as integral to the learning process. In terms of content area, one of the dilemmas for teachers may be to discern which concepts or ideas are most amenable to constructivist teaching or "meaning making," and which have agreed-upon meanings which make them less open to active construction. For example, language arts concepts such as spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure use a relatively concise symbol system with generally agreed-upon meanings, whereas reading comprehension may be viewed "as highly interpretive and based on individual or cultural meanings of concepts and ideas" (p. 9). To varying extents, all three teachers taught skills explicitly and within language arts activities and other curriculum areas. Jean and Anna involved their students, emergent readers and writers, in making words and spelling activities as a component of their balanced literacy program and embedded skill development within reading and writing activities. Anna's teaching of reading skills was a part of every language arts lesson and evident in any subject in which her students were required to read. Jean used varied games, books, and learning resources in the workstations and found teachable moments throughout the day to help her students develop their skills in reading and writing. Belle's teaching of skills was most often embedded within the teaching and learning activities of a thematic unit or project. When students crafted a poem, developed interview questions, or participated in a peer conference on writing, they attended to such things as punctuation and spelling.

Unlike Jean and Anna, Belle was not formally teaching the district's balanced literacy program, and her older Grade 6 students did not appear to be involved in the same kinds of literacy activities (such as making words and spelling activities) as the younger, emergent readers and writers in Jean's and Anna's classes. As students progress through Division II and prepare for junior high or secondary school, the content of the curriculum subjects becomes more complex, and literacy skills are increasingly used by students as a means of learning in all content areas as they learn from, with, and through information texts. Lewis and Wray (2000a) indicated that the effective teaching of literacy for learning involves strategies such as activating prior knowledge (with brainstorming and concept mapping), developing subject specific vocabulary, interactive reading and discussion, and note taking. The strategies build upon the principles of modeling and scaffolding and were particularly apparent in Belle's teaching of her biography research project.

All three teachers encouraged and taught their students to apply their knowledge of skills within the content of their work. Each of the three teachers seemed to have a clear sense of the continuum along which explicit teaching approaches might build foundations upon which complex understandings can rest, or where the active, constructivist process of transacting knowledge can result in new understandings. Such a sense has also been confirmed in the research, where exemplary teaching of skills is done explicitly, in multiple ways, and on a continuum of direct instruction to whole-language approaches (Cantrell,

1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; & Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997).

Constructivist planning and teaching is fluid, exploratory and experimental in spirit, with activities designed to engage students in higher-level thinking and inquiry (Henderson, 1996). Knowledge is transacted, not transmitted; and through perception-based participant observation, the teacher tries to understand how the students are constructing meaning so that "on-the-spot diagnosis" of students' thinking can guide teaching. Authentic assessment practices, connected to the teaching and learning of the classroom, help teachers plan the teaching and learning activities, monitor student progress, and help students understand their own learning. Diagnosis, as a dynamic assessment tool for decision making, is a distinguishing element of scaffolding which enables the teacher to discover the level of competence of the student and to determine the support needed by the student to progress in learning (Hogan & Pressley, 1997). Coordinating the curriculum, in response to the unique needs of each student in the classroom, is complex work; instructional and curriculum decisions are made on an ongoing basis as the teacher actively monitors student progress and provides scaffolds to support student learning (Pressley et al., 2001)

It appeared in this case that, by monitoring student reading and writing (through observations of daily work, levelled reading materials, reading checklists, diagnostic tests, writing rubrics, and portfolios), the participants were able to provide the right amount of support and challenge to "scaffold" the students' learning. As well, the fluid nature of the participants' constructivist

teaching approaches, designed to stimulate higher-order thinking and help students make connections in their learning, was a feature of their exemplary teaching. For example, Belle approached a unit or topic of study with the "big picture" in mind; then the teaching and learning activities evolved throughout the unit. She emphasized generating, sharing, and explaining ideas; and a lesson often began with Belle asking students what they knew about a particular concept so that new learning could connect with what the student already knew. She frequently used mind maps or web ideas as the class brainstormed as a way to form and illustrate connections between ideas, people, and the "real world." She asked students to explain the thinking behind their ideas or responses to questions, which provided opportunities to expand on ideas or develop new concepts. Jean organized her classroom so that through the social interaction of working with their classmates and the literacy games and resources in the workstations, students were able to build new understandings about language arts. Jean watched her students, attempting to see and identify the students' perceptions so that she could help them make connections and understand how ideas "link" together. Morrow et al. (1999) found that the use of teachable moments is a critical part of exemplary literacy instruction; Jean used teachable moments not only to reinforce a previously learned concept, but also when she sensed that students were poised to see a new connection or were on the verge of understanding an idea in a new way. All three teachers were attuned to the social and conceptual learning needs of their students, but in Anna's class, meeting the social needs of the students appeared to be as much a part of the

teaching and learning as the development of conceptual understandings. Anna's "on-the-spot" perceptions of both how her students were learning and what they were learning were critical to ensure an uninterrupted flow of teaching and learning during class activities. She seemed to know how much support students needed to be successful, what degree of inquiry would be perceived as challenging rather than frustrating, and where the students' knowledge and comprehension could support higher-level thought processes, such as analysis or evaluation of concepts. Anna checked all of the students' assignments and homework each day and used that information as part of her planning to ensure that teaching and learning activities meet her students' needs.

Thus, in their constructivist teaching, each teacher appeared to demonstrate a capacity for teaching as "comprehension and reasoning, as transformation and reflection" (Shulman, 1987, p. 13). Such a capacity for pedagogical reasoning and action was reflected in the teachers' clear understanding of what they planned to achieve in language arts and in their carefully considered learning activities, active classroom teaching, and ongoing reflection, assessment, reconstruction, and analysis of what they and their students were learning. Through a process of pedagogical reasoning and action, the teachers' understandings were transformed through instruction into new understandings for both the teachers and the students. Constructivist teaching approaches, in which the teachers planned, taught, observed, and assessed student progress in a fluid way that was continually responsive to the learning

needs of their students, appeared to be an important part of the participants' exemplary teaching of language arts.

Dialogic Interaction

A characteristic of Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's interactive classrooms was that teacher and students talk with each other, a feature of exemplary teaching that has found confirmation in the literature (Henderson, 1992; Hogan & Pressley, 1997; Mercer, 1994). Within the classroom as a learning culture, there is a reciprocity to teaching and learning in which both teacher and student develop appropriate ideas and reconstruct them through dialogue (such as paraphrasing or recapping). Through spoken language, "concepts are shared and differing interpretations of them can be revealed and resolved" (Mercer, 1994, p. 105). Constructivist teaching relies upon conversation as "the dialogic process by which we create and negotiate knowledge with one another" (Hogan & Pressley, 1997, p. 10), and dialogue is the main way in which thinking strategies are developed and higher-order problems are solved. During teaching and learning activities, the teacher facilitates and guides the instructional conversations so that prior knowledge is activated, ideas are build upon, and new levels of understanding are reached (Hogan & Pressley, 1997). At the same time, dialogue was an essential component of the ethic of care demonstrated in each teacher's practice. "Dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy or appreciation" (Noddings, 1992, p. 23) that provides opportunities to question, to arrive at decisions, and to connect with others.

The critical nature of dialogue was seen most obviously in Belle's teaching, where her students (with English as a second language) were not as overtly or readily verbal as Jean's and Anna's students. One of Belle's challenges was to get her students to take risks: to talk, to share ideas, and to explain how they arrived at their answers. Not only was dialogue essential to establishing and maintaining a caring relationship, but it was also critical for the development of the higher-order thinking skills that were so much a part of Belle's teaching. To establish a trusting relationship, Belle began by telling her students about herself and showing through her conversation and actions that she was consistent, caring, and encouraging. Her teaching continued to emphasize dialogue as a way to maintain caring relationships and foster student thinking and to move students from the expectation that a teacher transmits all knowledge to a place where they could interactively, with their teacher and classmates, construct and transact their own knowledge. Similarly, in Jean's teaching, ongoing dialogue or conversation was centred on what and how the students were learning and on affirming them as learners. Instructional conversations, such as the pre- and postreading discussions during guided reading, explored what students already knew that related to the book's topic and the way in which students could use specific strategies in their reading. The use of thinking and learning strategies was encouraged throughout the day and was a part of the students' own expressions. Anna liked her students to work with partners to "think-pair-share"; then ideas were discussed with the whole class.

Questions were encouraged, and each small step towards understanding was reinforced and praised.

Through dialogue, all three teachers made explicit the thinking behind the concepts that were being taught and helped students to link or connect new ideas with what they already knew, and all of the teachers encouraged discussion with partners, in small groups, and with the whole class. Thus, conversation supported both conceptual and social learning, even as it reinforced students' growth in linguistic expression. It appeared that dialogue, as an important part of the participants' exemplary teaching of language arts and as an expression of the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, supported constructivist teaching, the interactive nature of the learning culture, and the caring relationship between teacher and learner.

Expressions of Teaching and Learning

The teachers' expressions as they talked about their teaching practice provided insight on their pedagogical content knowledge and on the way in which that knowledge was enacted in their exemplary teaching of language arts. Through their expressions, images that portrayed the complex and interconnected nature of what they knew about teaching and learning were created. Within the imagery of their words, Jean, Anna, and Belle expressed a view of teaching as an amalgam of ongoing experiences, thoughts, and actions that was neither static nor linear. Anna said that "it isn't until you get in the classroom that you can start teaching and really start to learn," because "if it's all head knowledge, it doesn't always work," for "it's putting the two together." She

said that ideas would come to her as she was teaching, and even though there are suggested teaching approaches in her balanced literacy program, "you have to come up with your own way." Jean trusted her instincts and spoke of a felt sense as she was teaching with which she could tell "if it's working" or if she needed to change her approach. Belle said that as a "tried and true" teacher, she could see how projects could work and flow and fit together: "That's the joy of being experienced. It seems to all come. I've seen and done so many things; I know how it works." As expressed in the teachers' words, there was a fluidity to thoughts in action; pedagogical reasoning occurred through active teaching, so that teaching itself was a stimulus for thoughtfulness and action (Shulman, 1987).

A sense of Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's knowledge was revealed in their use of metaphorical expressions. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggested that "human thought processes are largely metaphorical" (p. 6), and van Manen (1990) proposed that each word we speak is derived from a metaphorical genesis. The use of metaphors, to make sense of the teacher's role in exemplary teaching, has been described in the literature (Claudet & Ellet, 1990; Gudmundsdottir & Saabar, 1991; Tobin & Fraser, 1991). The metaphor might describe good teaching as a skilled performance with subject matter knowledge, schema, script, and improvisation (Gudmundsdottir & Saabar, 1991). Or it might describe the teachers' conceptualizations of their roles as facilitators, monitors, and challengers (Claudet & Ellet, 1990) or "captain of the ship," "entertainer," "gardener," or "police officer" (Tobin & Fraser, 1991). However, Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's expressions appeared to be less descriptive of their roles and more

evocative of the knowledge that informed their teaching. There appeared to be a consistency and unity in how each teacher spoke of teaching and learning and in the observed nature of her practice. Further, the teachers' expressions seemed to be related to the ways in which teaching can engage students and meet students' needs. Morine-Dershimer and Reeve (1994) found that a teacher's natural use of metaphoric language reflects the teacher's underlying conceptions and may be a way in which the tacit knowledge of teachers can be more readily understood; such appears to be the case in this study.

Belle's and Jean's use of images and metaphorical language seemed to reflect a conception of teaching and learning in which meaning was transacted, in contrast to a view of learning in which the teacher, as expert, transmits the knowledge, and there is only one answer to any problem. Belle's expressions, in particular, contrasted her students' linear and convergent way of thinking with her own broader, more open-ended approach. Belle said that her students get "on a track with blinders on"; yet, having taught them for two years, she felt that now their "base is a bit broader." Her students did not choose books with "a broad look at life; they go for skinny," which again underscores Belle's broad conceptualization of teaching and learning. As well, she said that the students "seemed so frightened, and when they spoke, I could never hear them." This literal, but also metaphorical phrase, captured the notion of the students not yet having the confidence or the voice to share ideas, to brainstorm, and to explain the thinking behind their responses. By building a trusting relationship with students and teaching students that there are many ways of considering an

issue, Belle encouraged her students to take risks and transact their own knowledge. Constructivist teaching provides supports or scaffolds upon which students can make connections in their learning; Belle thought that she was "missing a connection" that would help her teach her students to be more expressive in their writing. Jean integrated the teaching of language arts concepts into all subject areas and helps her students form connections between ideas. She referred to the reading and writing strategies that she had taught her students as "all those building blocks that they're using to build." Students build or construct their knowledge so that each idea connects or links to another, and "it's exciting when the students pick up the link and talk about how it fits with something else they have done."

The metaphor of the relationship of "parts to the whole" (Morine-Dershimer & Reeve, 1994) illustrates Jean's and Belle's holistic conception of language arts and of how each component is related. With teaching experience, Jean began to see how "everything was built on each other, how the parts worked" and "how the reading fit together." She enjoyed teaching the balanced literacy program because it fit with how she taught before; the program "fits together" but goes beyond. She said that knowledge of language arts is important because you "have to know where you've been, where you're going, and how it fits together." Belle's preference for teaching language arts using a range of authentic literature rather than a textbook was clear; she was "not the kind of teacher who is on a certain page on a certain date," but her approach is to "be all over the place and then bring it together." Both Belle and Jean liked to see the connections between

concepts and teaching activities and how parts fit together to make the whole. Belle led the class in a webbing or mind-mapping activity to outline categories of information for a research project, and when planning a unit, she could see how it would flow and fit together. She liked to have the "big picture" (of a unit plan) in mind; it was shared with students so that they would know where they were headed; then she taught the smaller pieces of the picture. Thus, the teachers' knowledge of teaching language arts was conceptually organized in a holistic, meaningful way that encompassed its entire scope and, within it, the smaller component parts.

Anna's expressions were somewhat different, perhaps reflecting the context of her teaching situation with a classroom of "at-risk" students who struggled with their schoolwork and presented challenging behaviours. Strongly focused on the goal of teaching her students to read and write at grade level, her expressions related to her students' needs and her conceptualization of the kind of teaching that would most help them to succeed. Anna would do "what works" to achieve her goal of teaching her students to read and write and would "adapt to fit" the approach of the balanced literacy program, because it "fits" with the needs of the students. Her language was consistent with having a goal in mind and a plan or path for getting there that works. There are steps to build success; she said that you have to "walk before you can fly." Similarly, in Anna's teaching, language arts concepts (such as sentence structure or spelling skills) were broken down into components that built upon each other, and through Anna's modeling of each step, students were guided to move forward with increased

independence. Progress was measured by thinking back to "how far the students have come since September" and by seeing progress in even the small steps that had been achieved over the year. It was important to Anna to "build a foundation" for her students, and her practice was aligned with this goal. The foundation included the development of positive character traits within her students and the building of a solid base of learning in reading and writing. Her words conveyed this dual focus: She "tried to build community" in her classroom by teaching her students appropriate social skills and character-building skills. Similarly, Anna said that the balanced literacy program "does work for them, and you can see it coming through, and you can see it building," in reference to skill-development activities such as "making words" and "sorting and transferring" and the use of levelled books (at the students' instructional levels) to develop reading comprehension.

Each teacher expressed an understanding of the complexity of teaching and learning. Anna was characteristically forthright, noting that

> everybody is teaching, wherever you are, by how you behave and what you say and do, but being a classroom teacher is not something just anyone can do; it is too complicated and demanding, with too many things that are involved.

Belle expressed the complexity in terms of colour and of her students. The students were "black and white, not coloured"; they seemed to think in convergent and linear ways, unlike the open-ended and divergent thinking that underlay Belle's teaching. The imagery extended to Belle's use of coloured thinking hats as an instructional resource which provided students with a visual image of a way of thinking that was more complex and where explanations,

rather than yes or no answers, were sought. Jean also referred to colour to express her sense of the complexity of teaching. Teaching was seen as "less black and white; there are more grays now," because over the years her understanding of teaching had deepened and she saw the child as "a whole person."

Thus, the teachers' conceptualizations of teaching and learning resonated in their natural use of metaphorical expressions, and each teacher's expressions about teaching and learning were uniquely personal. Belle wanted her students to think and interact in ways that embraced the complexity and potential of a colourful "real world." Jean saw her young students as active participants and leaders of a vibrant, interesting learning community where ideas and people connect, and Anna was determined that her students would build a solid foundation for academic, personal, and social growth. All three teachers wanted their students to develop and apply their abilities as successful readers and writers and to demonstrate care and respect in their interactions with others. All teachers expressed their knowledge of teaching and learning in ways that reflected their specific teaching situations and their students.

Summary and Implications of the Findings

The study's descriptions and interpretations attempt to capture the individualistic, complex, and contextually bound way in which teachers' pedagogical content knowledge was manifested in their exemplary teaching of language arts. To summarize, the findings fall within the following areas: (a) developing as a teacher, (b) knowing the learner, (c) creating a learning

culture, (d) teaching for student learning, and (e) expressions of teaching and learning. The themes are evocative of the teachers' knowledge base for teaching, in which pedagogical content knowledge encompasses all areas of knowledge and is the key to that knowledge base (Shulman, 1987). At the same time the themes capture essential features of exemplary teaching in language arts (Cantrell, 1999; Lewis & Wray, 2000b; Morrow & Asbury, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al, 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000).

In *developing as a teacher*, each teacher expressed an approach to teaching and learning that appeared to derive from her background of teaching experiences, professional development opportunities, and work with colleagues. Further, that background of experience seemed to shape the way in which the teachers' knowledge of the learner, content, and general pedagogy was expressed through their teaching. It seemed that both the teachers' knowledge and their practice have been shaped by past experiences just as they continue to experience growth, reflectiveness, and ongoing learning in their teaching today.

Knowing the learner captures the teachers' extensive knowledge of the learner, as evidenced, for example, in the warm and supportive pedagogical relationship created between teacher and students. It was found that each teacher needed to know the learner and to establish a caring, trusting relationship through dialogue and interaction to support a relationship in which learning could occur. Critical to knowing the learner was the teachers' attunement to students, where the subtle signs of the learner's thoughts and

understandings were perceived, appreciated, and responded to by the teacher. By being attuned to individuals, it appeared that the learning of both individuals and the large group of students was elevated.

In *creating a learning culture*, each teacher's knowledge of content and pedagogy was apparent in the way that she structured the environment of her classroom to support learning. Although the context of each classroom was quite different, each teacher structured the learning environment as a learning culture in which "learning to learn" was fostered and encouraged and where the ethics and dispositions of the teacher were reflected in the physical, social, and intellectual structures of the classroom. Teaching practices evocative of *creating a learning culture* included excellent classroom management and the arranging of a literacy-rich classroom environment that was positive and reinforcing.

In *teaching for student learning*, each teacher's extensive repertoire of language arts teaching strategies and curriculum expertise not only suggested knowledge of content and pedagogy, but also was strongly illustrative of the pedagogical content knowledge that encompasses all of the knowledge bases. Here too the complexity of teaching for student learning was apparent as each teacher demonstrated a capacity for pedagogical reasoning and action to transform, through instruction, something known and understood by the teacher into new understandings for the student (Shulman, 1987). There is no one right way to teach, and the underlying emphasis on teaching for learning meant that teacher knowledge of language arts was entwined with a range of approaches to facilitate student understanding of the content area. A foundation of effective

teaching strategies appeared to provide a base upon which exemplary literacy practices were built; a balance of reading and writing activities, guided and independent work, explicit and implicit instruction, and group and individual work was apparent. Articulated modeling of metacognition strategies (while reading, for example), and constructivist enactments (with exploratory planning, dialogue to transact rather than transmit knowledge, and attunement to students) kept the focus on meaning-centred learning. Similarly, teaching strategies such as the explicit teaching of skills, the use of authentic literature, connecting concepts across the curriculum, ensuring high academic engagement, and scaffolding to match expectations to student competencies are captured by this theme.

Finally, in *expressions of teaching and learning* each teacher spoke in ways that seemed to express (sometimes metaphorically) their conceptualizations of teaching and learning and their aspirations and goals for their students. These expressions seemed to provide another layer through which to understand the texture of the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and of the way in which their knowledge of teaching was expressed in practice. The findings have value when viewed holistically and cohesively, reflecting the complexity of exemplary teaching.

Implications

The findings have implications for practice for a range of stakeholders. In the first instance, the findings have implications for classroom teachers and school-based educators, for whom the descriptions and interpretations of language arts teaching might prompt reflection, inquiry, and discussion as to the

nature of their own practices. As well, for those involved in the preservice education of teachers, there is the opportunity to use the descriptions and interpretations as a bridge between theory and practice. Case descriptions, as contextual, local, and situated narratives, offer the potential for both new and experienced teachers to see that

> content and process, feeling and thought, teaching and learning are not addressed theoretically as distinct constructs. They occur simultaneously as they do in real life, posing problems, issues, and challenges for new teachers that their knowledge and experiences can be used to discern. (Shulman, 1992, p. 28)

As an elementary school classroom teacher, I often wondered what other teachers did in their classrooms, how they related to their students, and what kinds of instructional strategies and activities were most supportive of students' curriculum learning. Just as teacher modeling enables students to see and understand, so too might descriptions and interpretations of teaching practice provide exemplars from which other educators might learn. My descriptive and interpretive account of the exemplary practice of three elementary language arts school teachers affords others with a detailed account of classroom practice to prompt individual reflection, as well as collegial conversations about teaching and learning. It may be that these descriptions of exemplary practice will resonate with other educators, as they see the way in which the complexities of the students and the subject matter are mediated when teaching elementary school language arts.

Although there have been ongoing debates about the benefits of one strategy over another when teaching reading and writing, the findings highlight

that, for Jean, Anna, and Belle, there was no single way. Thus, educators may see in the findings the strength of a balanced approach to literacy instruction, where there is a range of reading and writing activities, guided and independent work, explicit and implicit skill instruction, and group and individual work. As well, because the findings address principles of practice that extend beyond the subject matter, the study may provide new insights for any teacher who is interested in the subtle nuances of exemplary teaching. Although exemplary teaching appears to rest upon a foundation of effective instructional and organizational strategies in which the teacher's positive, personal characteristics foster a warm democratic classroom (as seen in some of the effective teaching research), there also seem to be rich and textured layers which extend below the surface and add depth to that foundation. The findings suggest the importance of establishing and maintaining, with dialogic interaction, the kind of trusting, caring relationship that is focused on helping each student to learn. The teachers' attunement to students; the way in which the classroom can be physically, socially, and intellectually structured as a learning culture; and the use of constructivist, meaning-centred approaches are significant findings that may resonate with teachers and engender new understandings for classroom practice. School principals and those involved in summative and formative evaluations of teachers might see in the findings how exemplary teaching is manifested and, in turn, develop their own conceptual and perceptual attunement to exemplary teaching practice. Teacher evaluation documents might include areas of competency (such as planning and preparation, communication skills,

classroom organization and management, instructional and assessment strategies, and personal and professional attributes), but the findings also support a view of exemplary teaching as a learning-centred, constructivist practice. The findings suggest that the pedagogical content knowledge that teachers have about teaching and learning is as critical to exemplary teaching as are the observable skills and methods which are used.

The exemplars of practice may illuminate, for those involved in professional development and teacher education, the complex nature of teacher knowledge expressed in exemplary teaching of language arts. A body of research has identified effective teaching skills, theoretical understandings about learners and learning, and subject matter knowledge as essential components of teaching (Brophy & Good, 1986; Demon-Berger, 1986; Doyle, 1986; Walberg, 1991), but exemplary teaching also seems to encompass teaching where students actively learn how to learn, where teachers are attuned to the subtle expressions of students who are engaged in learning, and where subject matter knowledge is taught and understood in reciprocal and transactional ways. The findings suggest that pedagogical content knowledge, actively expressed through pedagogical reasoning and action, informs teaching practice. Whereas teacher education programs provide opportunities to develop the instructional and organizational skills of teaching, so too might they encompass the perceptual abilities of teachers to "read" their students and the classroom. The findings suggest that teachers' knowledge is not static, but continually developing; a propensity for reflective and constructivist practice, and attunement to students

(such as through participant observation and "on-the-spot" diagnosis of students' thinking to guide teaching) might be developed during teaching education programs. The study highlights how an ethic of care works in concert with attunement to students, where teachers know their students and care enough to watch their students for the subtle signs that they are learning. Teacher education programs might foster the dispositions that a teacher holds towards students and attend to the heart of a teacher's work.

School and district reform efforts often focus on addressing the literacy needs of students. Teachers, schools, and school districts may see in the descriptions and interpretations of exemplary teaching an approach to teaching that encompasses an array of language arts-based strategies and activities to foster student learning. Perhaps the search for the one "right method" will be less intense, with teachers encouraged to develop a range of strategies and approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students. The findings also suggest that professional development opportunities and collaborative support (as in Jean's and Anna's balanced literacy meetings and Belle's work with committees and colleagues) are critical parts of exemplary teaching. It may also be apparent that the context of the teaching situation, as perceived by the teacher, plays a significant role in the way in which programs and resources are adapted to fit unique and individualistic needs.

The findings also add to the bodies of knowledge on exemplary language arts teaching and teacher knowledge and practice. Shulman (1987) suggested that descriptions and analyses of excellent teaching can provide "codified

representations of the practical pedagogical wisdom of able teachers" (p. 11) from which principles of good practice can be inferred. Shulman further suggested that such representations can both inform and reform educational practice, as we conceptualize and delineate a professional knowledge base for teaching. The study's descriptive and interpretive account of exemplary teaching in elementary school language arts contributes in both of these areas. The representations of practice, as recorded in Chapter Four, provide detailed information about exemplary teaching in language arts from which to discern principles of practice. These principles corroborate and extend our understandings of exemplary language arts teaching and of the knowledge base that underlies classroom practice. The descriptions of practice, with the interpretive account, inform our understanding of how teachers' pedagogical content knowledge mediates the complexity of the triadic relationship between teacher, student, and content matter.

The scope of the research was limited to understanding exemplary teaching of language arts from the perspective of teacher knowledge and practice, but implications for further research are apparent. One area of interest may be in considering exemplary teaching within the context of a planned change, such as the implementation of a balanced literacy program. Two of the study's participants were teaching a particular version of a balanced literacy program developed by their school district, whereas the other teacher had considerably more flexibility in the design of her language arts program. Jean and Anna supported the program's rationale and approach, they enjoyed

meshing the new ideas with how they already taught, and they appreciated the opportunities for ongoing, collaborative professional development. Interestingly, Belle was hesitant to become involved in the district's balanced literacy program, should the program extend into her grade level, because her perception of the program was that she would be prescribed to teach in a certain way. As Jean and Anna found ways to make the program work in their classrooms, it appeared that the school district's balanced literacy program had been adapted at the classroom level in ways that were meaningful for these particular teachers and students. It was beyond the scope of this study to fully consider the process and manner of the program's implementation in the participants' schools, but further research might specifically consider the implications of supporting and sustaining exemplary teaching during the implementation of programs such as "balanced literacy." Additionally, the nature of professional development that develops and encourages exemplary practice while in the midst of such change efforts might be explored.

Each teaching situation is unique in terms of the classroom and students, but also in terms of the context of the school. The three participants taught within the same school district, but at different grade levels and in very different schools. Anna's school provided a range of supports for its "at-risk" students and was focused on balanced literacy and character building. Providing a Mandarin program in Belle's school necessitated limited time for English programming, which did not readily support an integrated, in-depth approach, yet Belle's philosophy of teaching was apparent. Jean's school was focused on improving

the literacy development of its students and on incorporating a fine arts component into its programs. Although the study found that all three teachers created learning-focused cultures within their classroom, it did not specifically look at the context of the school. Continued research might further explore the nature of exemplary teaching within, and supported by, the broader cultural contexts of a school and/or district.

Reflection on the Research

As a teacher, I have experienced the excitement of classrooms where constructivist teaching is meaning and learner centred. I hold special memories of times when teaching seemed to be just as it should, where the students and I were entangled in the excitement of teaching and learning together, and I would think, "It doesn't get any better than this." As a school principal, I have been responsible for summative evaluations of teachers where specific criteria have defined excellence in teaching, but where qualitative information is needed to more fully illuminate the special qualities inherent in exemplary teaching. Thus, when I began my research, I wanted to better understand how exemplary teaching works and to explore my sense that there is a "grace of practice" that distinguishes exemplary teaching. Because I wanted to explore the subtleties and nuances of such teaching in some depth, I chose to do a descriptive and interpretive case study, to situate the study within the curriculum area of language arts, and to consider how a teacher's pedagogical content knowledge informs his or her teaching practice. My own stance as an educator and researcher was ever present in the conceptualization of the study, in the

research design and methodology, and in the descriptive and interpretive accounts. As a school teacher and principal, and now as a researcher, I have been privileged to observe exemplary teaching and to further develop my sense that teaching is not a technical undertaking, but an amalgam of richly textured layers of what the teacher knows and does. Throughout the research, and as I reflect upon the findings, I have often returned to my original question, "How does exemplary teaching work?"

As I conducted my review of the literature, it was readily apparent that the literature on exemplary teaching is far ranging; it did not seem possible that a case study such as mine could contribute new understandings to such a large body of knowledge. Research in areas such as effective teaching practices, teacher thinking and knowledge, reflective practice, and excellence in language arts (literacy) instruction each offered relevant and meaningful information about what it is that constitutes exemplary teaching. In looking at the effective teaching literature, we see the competencies, characteristics, and behaviours upon which much of our formal knowledge of teaching has been built (Berliner, 1986; Brophy & Good, 1986; Demon-Berger, 1986; Doyle, 1986; Walberg, 1991). From studies of excellent literacy teaching, principles of best practices have been derived (Cantrell, 1999; Gambrell & Mazzoni, 1999; Lewis & Wray, 2000b; Morrow & Asbury, 1999; Morrow et al., 1999; Pressley et al., 1998; Pressley et al., 2001; Wharton-McDonald et al., 1997; Wray et al., 2000). We know that good teaching exists as part of a interdependent relationship with student learning (Brown & McIntyre, 1993; Common, 1991; Harris, 1999; Macrorie, 1984) and that an ethic

of care, focused on building and affirming the best in students, is a critical part of that relationship (Collinson, 1996; Collinson & Killeavy, 1999; Noblit et al., 1995; Noddings, 1992). Yet the statements from any one area of research alone do not bear the weight of what goes on in any one person's classroom. Taken individually, each study provides its own results, interpretations, and stance; taken collectively, it illuminates the complexity of teaching and the difficulty in arriving at a definitive explanation of how exemplary teaching works. However, all contribute to our understandings of what might coalesce in exemplary teaching.

As I conducted the research, analyzed the data, and wrote about my findings, it became apparent that there was in fact no definitive explanation of exemplary teaching. I also began to realize that the value of my research lies not in any one, new, significant finding, for there is, as Pressley et al. (1998) noted, "no single bullet that develops effective literacy but rather that learning strategies and skills, metacognition, content knowledge and motivation work in interaction" (p. 19). I believe that the value of my study lies in the rich layering and weaving of the findings, of the many strands of what we know and continue to learn about exemplary teaching and teacher knowledge, woven in such a way that new insights and textures are visible. My findings link or connect many of the ideas and viewpoints that have been explored within a range of literature and provide a holistic view of exemplary teaching. Still, explaining how exemplary teaching works has been one of the challenging aspects of my research. When I tell my colleagues and friends what I am working on, they are immediately interested in the topic as relevant and practical; when I am asked what I have found, there is

an expectation that there will be three or four new, useful ideas that can change practice. As I provide a summary of the key findings, I am aware that even as I am doing so, I am also reducing and simplifying teaching and possibly doing an injustice to the complexity of our profession. Exemplary teaching works in ways that are not simply explained, and I hope that those who are truly interested in exemplary teaching as an expression of teacher knowledge will read the study's findings in their entirety and will view each aspect of exemplary teaching practice as interdependent parts of the whole.

When I began the research, I thought a great deal about whether I would study exemplary teachers or exemplary teaching. As explained in the discussion of terms in Chapter One, I have purposefully used the term *exemplary teaching* to describe the many layers of excellence in teaching, and in the study I have explicitly talked about exemplary practice rather than attach a label to a teacher. This was done because of my concern for context and my sense that even the very best teacher can experience times when teaching is not as it might be. My personal experience as a classroom teacher spans 17 years, four different schools, and seven grade levels, during which time there were both momentary and prolonged periods of teaching that seemed to "work." At other times I faced the challenges and concerns that my teaching was not meeting my students' needs and that somehow things were not "working out" as they should. My conceptual framework therefore supports the notion of exemplary teaching as contextually bound and where the relationship of teacher, student, and subject is multilayered and constantly shifting. As Pendlebury (1995) noted:

> The teaching situation—which includes such things as the institutional context, the epistemic predicaments of the students, and the teacher's own talents and limitations—sets constraints on what is possible and constitutes the criteria for excellent practice. Sound practical judgment takes account both of what is ideal and of what is possible under particular circumstances. (p. 26)

During the course of the study I had the opportunity to spend extended periods of time in three very different classrooms, where the approach of the teachers appeared to be quite different. In each case of exemplary teaching, the context of the teaching situation engendered different approaches and teaching practices distinct for each of the three teachers, but also distinct within the individual teacher's experiences. Yet, despite the different approaches and the unique circumstances of each teacher's context, there were underlying commonalities in the teachers' practice that were clearly evident. All three teachers demonstrated the kinds of instructional and organizational skills described in the effective teaching literature. The teachers' ethic of care and their attunement to learners was apparent, just as the dialogic interaction and collaborative practices of the classroom as a learning culture supported the intent of teaching students to learn how to learn. Teaching for learning meant constructing and transacting knowledge and teaching in such a way that the learner, subject matter, and teacher, however amorphous and shifting, were meaningfully linked. Although the study's conceptual framework purposefully considers exemplary teaching to be contextually and temporally bound, the study has reinforced my sense that there are underlying principles of exemplary teaching meaningfully understood by teachers. It has also reinforced my sense that there are teachers who are finely attuned to their context and have a depth and breadth of pedagogical content

knowledge that enables them to adjust their practice to make things work in the best way possible for each teaching situation. The study describes exemplary teaching rather than exemplary teachers, but I am left wondering whether there are inherent qualities within Jean's, Anna's, and Belle's teaching practices that might transcend their particular context and time.

One of the delights of conducting research on exemplary teaching is the affirmation that it has provided. It seems that as we become more and more focused on issues of accountability, teachers are most often scrutinized for ways in which their practice can be improved. It was a joy to spend time in classrooms where the purpose was not to judge, evaluate, or recommend changes in practice, but to describe and interpret the participants' exemplary teaching. The experience was affirming for the teachers, because each enjoyed the opportunity to talk about her teaching. Their thoughts and perspectives have been valued as a source of insight wherein "outstanding teachers are thoughtful, caring people who reflect continuously on their work, and yet are seldom tapped as a valuable resource for an understanding of teaching" (Ayers & Schubert, 1994, p. 114). Jean, Anna, and Belle told me that my questions prompted valuable reflection about their own teaching that led to new insights and ideas; they welcomed my classroom visits as a collaborative experience, and they seemed to view the research process as a personal and meaningful form of professional development. So too was the research personally affirming, as I saw in each teacher's practice and ways of thinking and doing that resonated with my own experiences as a teacher and extended my own learning about teacher

development. So too was the research personally affirming, as I saw in each teacher's practice and ways of thinking and doing that resonated with my own experiences as a teacher and extended my own learning about teacher knowledge and exemplary practice. Anna's persistence, determination, patience, and energy; Belle's creative and holistic thinking; and Jean's love of exciting, new ideas to make children happy and learning fun affirmed the characteristics that I can bring to my work as an educator. The findings both strengthen and affirm my resolve to continue to support exemplary teaching practice in all of its complexity and as more than the sum of its parts.

As a researcher, I have tried to observe the subtleties and nuances of exemplary teaching and to see and hear the ways in which teacher knowledge is expressed. I have tried to document the unique and complex practice of three teachers with the hope that my description and interpretation of the richness of their thoughts and actions can affirm, inform, and inspire the work of educators. In keeping with the conceptualization of the study, generalizations about exemplary teaching have not been drawn. Yet I hope that those who read the study will experience a resonance with the descriptive and interpretive account and feel a sense of affirmation for the work that they are doing in support of teaching and learning. I hope that the findings will inform and inspire, for, ultimately, the significance of the study will be found in its power to change practice as we strive for exemplary teaching that fosters student learning.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE LETTER TO TEACHER PARTICIPANTS

University of Alberta

Dear _____
(Name of teacher)

I am a teacher and a principal, currently on sabbatical as a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. I am conducting a research study with a purpose to understand the nature of exemplary teaching. The study will focus on describing the knowledge and teaching practices of exemplary elementary school language arts teachers. I am asking you to participate in this study.

The study will be conducted as an interpretive, descriptive case study, with flexibility in its design, so that as much as possible about exemplary teaching can be learned from each participating teacher. Your involvement in the study would include an initial, taped interview in which we would talk about your teaching practices, and your beliefs and understandings about student learning. We would need to arrange times for regular, weekly visits so that I can observe in the classroom as you are involved in language arts activities with your students. I would also like to look at the resources and materials in your classroom, and I anticipate that we would be involved in informal conversations during the course of the two to three month research period. A final taped interview would complete the data collection.

Participation in the study is free and voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. All of the data collected during the study will be secured and confidential, then destroyed upon completion of the study. Your anonymity is assured, and you will not be identifiable in any document resulting from the research. The research will be conducted as approved by the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board, and in a manner that is respectful of your teaching needs.

I hope that you will participate in this study. There are no known risks associated with participation, and while research benefits cannot be guaranteed, I expect that you will find the experience to be affirming of your professional practice and expertise, and that the research findings will increase educational stakeholders' understandings of good teaching.

Should you have any questions, or desire further information, please contact me (481-6586 or E-mail: etams@powersurfr.com.) or my supervisor, Dr. Linda Phillips (492-4250, or E-mail: linda.phillips@ualberta.ca.). Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Tams

APPENDIX B

TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How is it that you came to be an elementary school teacher?
2. Tell me about your teaching role.

   Assignment, Responsibilities in school

   What do you believe a teacher's role is?
3. Tell me about the students in your class.
4. In general, what are your goals for your students?
5. Do you hold to any particular beliefs about students and learning?
6. What is important for students to learn in language arts?
7. How would/Can you describe your approach to teaching language arts?
8. Describe the way in which you teach children to read. Why do you teach in this way?
9. Describe the way in which you teach children to write. Why do you teach in this way?
10. Tell me about how you address areas of language arts other than reading and writing.
11. How would you describe successful language arts teaching?
12. How do you know when you are successful in language arts teaching?
13. Why have you arranged your classroom in this way?
14. Are there particular types of resources you like to use?
15. Are you supported in your teaching of language arts? In what ways?
16. How do you learn about teaching language arts?
17. Is there anything else I should know about that is important in your teaching?

    In your work with students? To support learning?

E. Tams
Nov./00